The CONSPIRATORS

by

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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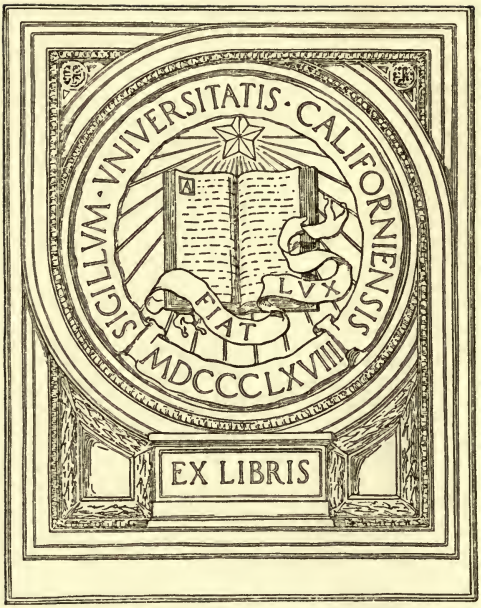
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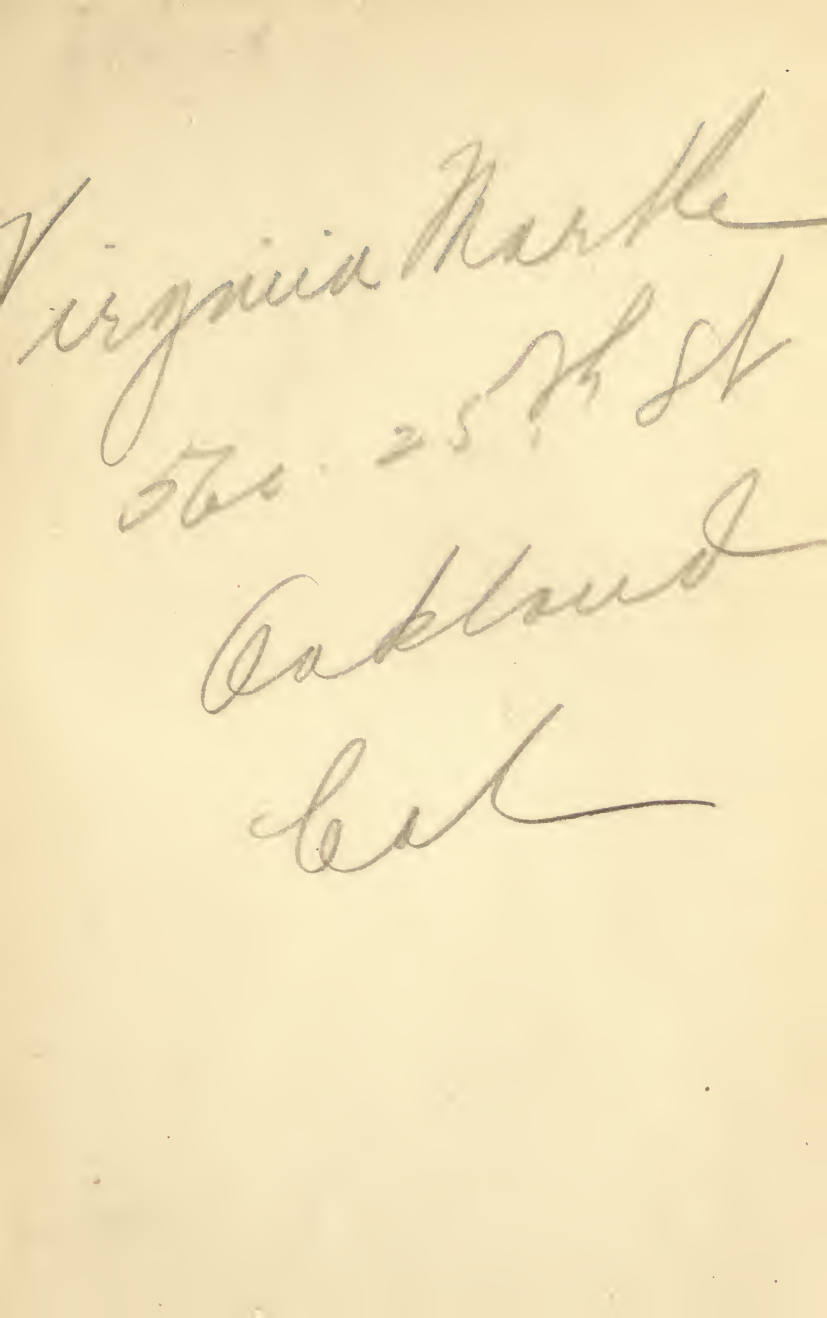

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"'TAKE IT,' SHE WHISPERED; 'DON'T FORGET ME'"

THE CONSPIRATORS

A Romance

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS
AUTHOR OF
"THE KING IN YELLOW" "THE RED REPUBLIC"
"LORRAINE" ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1900

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

LORRAINE. A Romance. Post 8vo, Cloth, $1 25.

Taking as his background the fiercely contested province of Lorraine, Mr. Chambers has given us in this romance a vivid story of the strenuous days of the Franco-Prussian War. The book abounds in brilliant scene and character description, and in the wealth of life and color which his readers have learned to expect from Mr. Chambers's pen, while the plot is one of strong and sustained interest. "Lorraine" will appeal irresistibly to those who appreciate the best type of adventure story, and is to be further commended for its historical color and for the delicacy of its love element.

NEW YORK AND LONDON:
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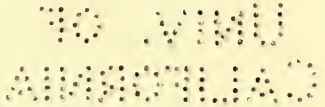

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TO ELSIE

You, to whom I tell my tale,
  Swinging in your hammock there,
Where the shadows wane and pale—
  Tell me, can my tale compare
With the romance you and I
Weave in living tapestry?

All the world shall be our loom,
  Every thought a shuttle flying,
  Threading, weaving, twining, tying,
  Tinting, gilding, staining, dyeing
Time itself with youth and bloom.

You, for whom I write my tales,
  Smiling in your hammock there,
Where the silken thistle sails
Tiny ships in tiny gales,
  Tempest-tossed on seas of air—
  There's a tale beyond compare
Where your drooping lids disguise
Magic legends in your eyes!

Every hour shall add a page
  In our romance gaily blending,
  Every dawn a chapter sending,
  Every eve a chapter ending;
"Thou and I—from Age to Age!"

Swinging in your hammock there,
  Where a slanting sunbeam paints
Aureoles around your hair
  Fair as on your sister saintes—
Read once more the glowing page:
"Thou and I—from Age to Age!"

April, 1899. R. W. C.

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THE CONSPIRATORS

"Are you riding to a Tourney with your banner and your Crest?"

"I am riding for my Vengeance to the Lists of Love addressed,
And the Cavalier I challenge bears a Golden Bow on high;
He shall render me High Justice in the Lists of Love—or die!"

"Are you fighting for Your Vengeance there a-kneeling on your knee?"

"I am fighting for My Vengeance—O! the empty Victory!
Let him mock the heart he's stricken! there's Another Heart to wring,
And I'll bear it on my banner from the Kingdom of the King!"

"Are you suing the King's Mercy with his arrow in your breast?"

"I am suing the King's Mercy that he shrive my sin confessed,
For I've ridden the King's Tourney and I've fallen at his thrust,
And his Shaft is in my bosom and my Crest is in the dust."

R. W. C.

April, 1899

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THE CONSPIRATORS

CHAPTER I

SECRET HISTORY

Concerning myself, an emperor, and a few other important people

HAD it not been for the restlessness of William the Sudden, this would never have been written. The trouble began in his Majesty's ear, I believe—I have forgotten which one. At any rate, the trouble spread—I do not mean locally, but in accordance with the inelegant Muscovite proverb: "When the Czar itches, all Asia scratches."

So when the Emperor's auricular irritation set him scheming and plotting, those symptoms of international agitation known as canards kept the telegraph busy until even the United States stirred like a sleepy watch-dog vibrating with subterranean grumbles. Nevertheless, in the daily papers there was nothing more than the usual rumours of war in Europe. Nobody imagined that America had any interest in the Luxembourg question. Therefore what I write may surprise some people.

Late in that oppressive month of July I had been

detached from my regiment, the Seventh Cavalry, and ordered to Washington—why, I knew not. I had absolutely nothing to do in the city except to report at the War Department every day, study geography, and brush up my knowledge of French, Dutch, and Flemish.

For a week I sweltered in the broiling city, wondering what I was wanted for, until a chance word from the Assistant Secretary of War gave me my cue. I was utterly amazed. I had read in the daily papers something about the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the mild European sensation concerning the Emperor's rumoured intentions towards it. I knew, as everybody knows, that Luxembourg, once a state belonging to the German Confederation, is now an independent Grand Duchy closely allied to Holland. This small triangular country, hemmed in by Belgium, France, and Rhenish Prussia, and secretly coveted by all three, served as a buffer-state to keep these Christian nations from inter-assassination. It was practically defenceless; its capital, the crumbling city of Luxembourg, contained a single battalion of troops, a grand duke, a duchess, and a dozen cannon. Yet its very weakness was its safeguard—or at least had been its safeguard until the ear of William the Sudden tickled that monarch into a mischievous activity that threatened to arouse all Europe. For William cast his weather-eye towards Luxembourg, and, deciding it to be proper ground on which to plant the gospel of his consecrated person, set his archæologists to work to prove that Luxembourg had always belonged to him, and that the treaty of London was void. The archives of the German Confederation which once existed, corrobo-

rated his tentative claim—at least he said they did; but the pretty young Queen of Holland turned up her pretty nose and quietly mobilised two drowsy Dutch army corps, which contributed to the merriment of the initiated and the irritation of William the Sudden. And all this time the public suspected nothing, and the press saw in the mobilisation merely the autumn manœuvres of the Dutch army.

Then intrigue followed intrigue and politics waxed hotter, and France secretly created more artillery and Belgium built more forts—forts utterly superfluous, by-the-way, as everybody knows that there are already more forts in Belgium than regiments to garrison them.

England, rising heavily from her sea-washed chalk cliffs, looked out across the channel and glared at Luxembourg. Then the Atlantic cables began to grow hot with cipher codes—messages that culminated in a secret understanding—the proposed joint seizure of Samoa by England and the United States the moment a German soldier set foot on Luxembourg soil. Yet of this understanding the public had not the faintest suspicion.

That was the situation until the tension increased, when William the Sudden made a speech to his guard regiments, full of concentrated and consecrated malice, which startled a Foreign Office and a Department of State. The public, not understanding it, derided its author.

In the astonished silence that ensued, the United States, ignoring its traditional policy, executed an unobtrusive masterpiece of diplomacy neither noticed nor understood by anybody except the government

officials directly concerned. And yet it was exquisitely original and almost Asiatic in its complicated simplicity. It was this:

An American Commissioner had been named and sent to Luxembourg, ostensibly en route for the Antwerp Exhibition. Once in Luxembourg, however, he was quietly received as the accredited representative of the United States, the first foreign minister to the independent state of Luxembourg.

This unprecedented action signified the unmistakable decision of the United States that Luxembourg was to remain an independent country; it made clear to Germany that any imperial action towards the acquisition of Luxembourg would be considered as an act of conquest on the part of Germany towards a free and friendly state.

The blow fell hard on William; he had expected to have some moral excuse for action. Now he had none. This diplomatic slap in the face did not sweeten his disposition. To smite him was an awful thing; the United States government knew that, and waited for a Teutonic upheaval. And the sensational press and the prying public never imagined that the United States and Germany stood on the brink of war.

Affairs were at this stage when I was ordered to Washington. Affairs remained in that state until, to the admiration and amusement of the few officials who enjoyed the confidence of the Executive, it was hinted that the President had decided to send a military attaché to the Legation at Luxembourg. I was to be that attaché, not because I possessed the slightest diplomatic ability, but because I spoke Dutch, French, and Flemish, and was not ignorant of the Wal-

loon dialect. So, one beautiful morning in August, after a rambling and tedious lecture from the Secretary of War, I packed my grip and climbed aboard a B. & O. train for New York.

A week later I was in Paris.

An hour later I was in trouble.

CHAPTER II

TWO PASSPORTS

In which there is the devil to pay

WHEN the Brussels-Antwerp through express left Paris for the city of Luxembourg late in the afternoon, the first-class smoking compartment was occupied by two young men. One had been handed a telegram just as the train moved off. He turned a trifle pale as he opened it. He did not interest me particularly, although I hoped he had received no bad news. I could not ask him, however, because I did not know him.

The other young man sat smoking and drumming noiselessly on the car window with gloved fingers. That was the man who interested me. I glanced into the panel-mirror across the aisle, and nodded at my own reflection in friendly fashion, then turned again towards the window, to blink at trees, hedges, and telegraph-poles flying past, until the monotony tired me and I picked up the *Figaro* and read it through.

Now although there was little in the paper to interest me, a single news item tucked away on the third page momentarily arrested my attention. The item was food for a cynic's digestion. It read :

"Prince Edric, of Prussia, is said to be deeply in love with a beautiful peasant girl of Luxembourg. As his intentions are *honourable*, the situation causes the Emperor great unhappiness."

The paragraph started a train of thought which I followed, leaning on the window-sill, until I unconsciously began to weave a pretty romance around the peasant girl of Luxembourg and the handsome Prussian prince.

The train roared across a trestle; below, a swiftly rushing river flashed into sight, then vanished, and again the broad level plain, spotted with poplars, stretched peacefully away to the horizon.

I had been lounging there by the window for some time, absorbed in my own thoughts, eyes noting indifferently the changeless procession of trees and fields, when the sound of a match scraping behind me drew my attention. My fellow-traveller was attempting to set fire to a cigar, an atrocious one, from which he had just pulled a straw. I thought to myself: "There is but one nation sufficiently degraded to foster trade in that kind of cigar; my companion is a German."

I spoke to him pleasantly in German. I can do it when mentally excited. He courteously removed the cigar from his lips and replied conventionally to my conventional observation. Meanwhile his match had burned out. I saw him prepare to strike another; at the same moment he caught my eye. What my face expressed I can only conjecture; at any rate, he again removed the cigar from between his lips and examined the slightly charred end.

"There is nothing the matter with it, is there?" he asked, seriously.

I leaned across the aisle to inspect the infernal machine; and we began a critical confab concerning tobacco, which ended in my suggesting that he give

an expert's opinion on one of my Havana cigars. He agreed; it was my first diplomatic triumph on foreign soil.

Now I knew that I was casting pearls; moreover, I had few American cigars left; but as long as my cigars and diplomacy held out, I swore that I should not suffocate to make a German's holiday.

When my companion expressed placid satisfaction with the cigar, I replied suitably, and we settled back on our velvet cushions, prepared for further confidences, or for silence.

After a few moments' aromatic reverie, I became conscious that my companion was staring at me. Instinctively I raised my head, but he was looking at the lamp in the ceiling, absently tearing the blue telegram to pieces.

We chatted a little; we touched on politics, partridge-shooting, and the Spanish loan. I tried him with English; he spoke it perfectly, so I knew he had not learned it in America, and he knew that I had.

Again I relapsed into a reverie, unconsciously taking up the thread where I had dropped a stitch in the romance of the prince and the peasant girl, indolently wondering where, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Prince Edric's inamorata dwelt.

As long as I was bound for the city of Luxembourg, it pleased me to think that I was going to a land where a prince could still love honourably, and where the opening bud of Romance proved that the stalk had not withered to the root. For the roots of Romance are bedded in chivalry; and not until chivalry and honour vanish from the world will the frail flower of Romance become extinct.

While I had been musing by the window, industriously smoking and constructing this metaphor, my eyes had followed an interminable landscape, monotonous, featureless, yet continually changing to a thousand dreary fac-similes of the original copyrighted view.

And all the while I had been instinctively aware that my German neighbour opposite had never taken his eyes off me. He studied my features persistently; he examined my clothes, my shoes. I gazed dreamily out of the rattling cinder-smeared windows, and I felt his eyes estimating my probable height.

"Continental curiosity," I thought to myself, yet as I thought it I knew there was no such thing as Continental curiosity. I had been educated in France.

A little impatient, I turned to encounter his direct gaze. He did not attempt to evade my eyes; on the contrary, he said, amiably:

"It is curious how we resemble each other. Have you observed?"

"No," I said, "I have not."

Irritation succeeded surprise as I noticed his dark, handsome eyes, his splendid colour, his perfectly shaped head, and contrasted them with my ordinary brown eyes, monotonous coat of tan, and stocky neck and head. He noticed my reserve.

"Nevertheless," he said, pleasantly, "I will wager, monsieur, that in your passport the official description of you would fit me in every particular."

"Oh," said I, "that is easily proven. Shall we lay a bet?"

"With pleasure," he replied; "and, furthermore, I will wager that the description in my passport will fit you."

"I'll take those bets," I said; "what are the stakes?"

"I beg you to name them," he replied, courteously.

"Very well," I said; "I'll lay you a dozen cigars against a cigarette that neither of our passports properly describes anybody but the owner." If I lost, at least I'd keep him smoking decent tobacco.

"Done—with pleasure," he said, drawing his passport from his pocket.

Fumbling in my breast-pocket for my own passport I had time to notice that his was engraved in German and bore the seals of the German Empire.

"Shall I read my passport?" I asked, opening the parchment and glancing at him.

"By all means," he replied, opening his own formidable document.

He raised the window, tossed out the pieces of his torn telegram, and turned to me expectantly. So I began:

"'UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

"' *To all to whom these presents shall come:*

"'GREETING,—I, the undersigned, Secretary of State of the United States of America, hereby request all whom it may concern to permit Gilbert Hardy, a citizen of the United States, safely and freely to pass, and, in case of need, to give him all lawful aid and protection.

"'Given under my hand and the seal of the Department of State at the City of Washington the
[SEAL] 17th day of July in the year of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and twenty-first.'

"Now," I continued, "follows the description:

"'Age, 25 years. Stature, 5 feet 7¼ inches. Forehead, medium. Eyes, brown. Nose, very slightly upturned. Mouth, medium. Chin, round. Hair, brown. Complexion, fair. Face, full. Mustache, short and light brown.'

"And," I ended, "here is my signature and the number of the passport—5329."

"Does not that description fit me also?" he asked.

I began to re-read the items, glancing up at him from time to time, and, to my surprise, found that everything except age and height described him as well as it did me.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Twenty-five."

"And are you five feet seven and a quarter inches in height?"

He made a rapid mental calculation from German to English measure.

"Exactly," he replied.

Then he read from his own passport his name, Stanerl Von Elbe, and the official description of himself which, translated into English, agreed exactly with the description of myself in my own passport.

"I have lost my bet," said I, laughing; "yet could any two people be really more unlike than you and I?"

"Suppose," said he, gayly, "that you and I exchange passports for a while—say for a month or two? It would be amusing, would it not?"

I laughed and folded up my paper.

"I mean it seriously," he said; "would you?"

"No," said I, frankly, "I don't think I would."

"Neither of us really have any use for passports in civilised Europe," he persisted; "and yet, do you

know, it would be of great service to me if you would exchange—say for a day or two."

At this extraordinary if not impertinent request I looked at the young fellow in surprise. He returned my stare and continued:

"I am perfectly aware how unusual such a suggestion may seem to you, Mr. Hardy, and I beg you to believe that I intend neither to affront you nor to attempt any familiarity that our casual acquaintance could not warrant."

"It certainly does not warrant our exchanging passports," I said.

"It warrants nothing," he replied, turning red. "I should scarcely have risked a snub from a stranger. I have been trying to make up my mind to ask you for your passport for the last hour."

"I cannot, of course, give you my passport," said I; "you yourself, Monsieur Von Elbe, will understand why."

"Because you don't know me?"

"Exactly; and because I don't propose to have a stranger impersonating me. Why should I?"

"Because," he said, in a low voice, "it might help me without harming you."

"If I knew that," I said, "you should have the passport."

He straightened up and dropped his left hand to a level with his hip, where, had he been an officer, he would have found a sword-hilt swinging.

"Can you not understand, monsieur," said I, irritably, "that I am not insulting you because I refuse to credit what you tell me? Nor should I, under such circumstances, expect you to believe me."

"GIVE ME YOUR PASSPORT"

Stanford

"I am a Prussian and an officer," he said, haughtily.

"That I knew when you reached for your sword—which," I continued, "is a habit of German officers not at all appreciated by Americans."

I was becoming more irritated every moment; he had tightened his lips and straightened up, shoulders squared, eyes narrowing with suppressed anger.

"When you acknowledge me to be an officer and a Prussian," he said, "you naturally admit me incapable of deception."

"And yet," I said, "you wish me to be a party to wholesale deception by furnishing you with my passport."

That staggered him; he gazed blankly at me, lips slightly parted.

"Let us drop the subject," I suggested, pleasantly; for, in spite of his impudence, I could not choose but like him; he was wonderfully handsome, and as manly a youngster as I had ever encountered.

"I cannot drop the subject," he said, with an effort; "all the humiliation you put me to is worth enduring—because I must have your passport."

"Must?" I repeated, sharply.

"Yes. You would give it to me if you knew what depends on your generosity."

"What depends on my generosity?"

"I cannot tell you."

I bowed and picked up the *Figaro;* not that I was going to read it, but it seemed a means of closing the discussion.

For ten minutes I scanned it mechanically—understanding nothing of what I read—wondering who the deuce this young fellow might be who took such easy

liberties with other people's property. My paper hid him from my view. He kept very still. After a while I slightly lowered the paper to glance at him, and found myself looking into the round black barrel of a revolver. There was a painful silence; I tried to rivet my gaze on his face, but my eyes always returned to that round black muzzle. Suddenly I made a quick motion towards my hip-pocket, and at the same moment the muzzle of his pistol chilled my ear.

"Give me your passport," he said, in a strained voice.

"The pleasure is mine," I replied, producing the document. "I was not before aware of your profession, monsieur, otherwise I might have made it more interesting for us both."

His hand trembled a trifle as he lowered the shining weapon, but he still kept me covered, his hand resting on his left knee.

"I am not a highwayman," he said, unsteadily; "I am driven to this."

"Oh, I see you are not a highwayman," I replied. "May I offer you my watch as a guarantee of my sympathy and admiration?"

He paled and raised his pistol, aiming at my eyes.

"Damn you," he said, fiercely, "if you insult me again, I'll fire this in your face!"

We sat silently facing each other. I, between apprehension and astonishment, found my wits in a sadly disordered condition, and I felt decidedly relieved when again he lowered his weapon and sat, breathing fast, watching my slightest movement.

My policy was to wait, and I knew it.

Presently he spoke again, distinctly, weighing every

phrase, trimming each word to the quick, and biting off sentences with a crisp snap.

"Your passport will be returned to you—my word as a Prussian officer. Give me your parole that you will not attempt to recover it by force. It will relieve us both."

"I give you my word that I won't attempt anything as long as you have me covered," I said.

"And if I put up my pistol?"

"Then God help you," I thought to myself.

"Answer," he repeated.

I shrugged my shoulders and looked out of the window. For I had an article in my hip-pocket that I was sure would interest him—and I wondered whether he'd give me half a chance to reach for it before we reached Luxembourg.

"May I look at my time-table?" I asked, gently.

"There are no stops between Paris and Luxembourg," he said.

CHAPTER III

EXTRAORDINARY PROCEEDINGS

Wherein an interesting question of precedence is settled

It was an hour before I spoke again. My companion sat quietly in his corner of the compartment, revolver and eyes focussed on my person. Whenever I made a movement he promptly levelled his weapon at my head and kept it in that annoying position until I became motionless again. To me the proceedings were at once humiliating and monotonous. At times I relapsed into a hypnotic inspection of the revolver muzzle always confronting me, although his firm hand rested easily on one knee.

As the slow minutes passed, the situation became more interesting to us both, because we knew that sooner or later we should arrive at the station. There I intended to turn the tables on my bandit friend from Prussia. Perhaps he read my thoughts. He glanced uneasily out of the car window, but as yet there was nothing to see except flat dusty plains, symmetrical poplars, and the level western sun, smouldering behind a straight band of violet haze.

Disgust had succeeded my first alarm; that too gave way to curiosity, then to ennui.

"Pooh," thought I, "the game is in my own hands when we come to the station."

Before long I felt that I was going to yawn, and

this pleased me. "For," thought I, "there are not so many people in this world who find time to yawn into the muzzle of a pistol."

"Pardon, monsieur," I said, "but I am about to commit a breach of etiquette. May I dissimulate the indiscretion with my hand ?"

He said nothing; I enjoyed my yawn, the more because I noticed he had not raised his too convenient pistol.

"I am under obligations to you," I said. "May I search in my pockets for my handkerchief ?"

"Are you armed ?" he demanded.

"I am doubly armed with innocence," I replied, flippantly.

"Anything else ?" he insisted, sarcastically.

"Oh, nothing but a Colt's six-shooter."

"Then never mind your handkerchief for the present," he returned.

As I didn't need my handkerchief, I didn't mind. After a while he again asked me for my parole, and I refused.

"I tell you no harm need come to you," he repeated.

I said nothing.

"But it may, unless you listen to me and do what I say," he added, with unconcealed impatience.

"Oh, I'll listen," I replied, "but I won't give you my parole. If I did I'd keep it—even to you."

He eyed me narrowly for a moment or two, during which I affected an interest in the sunset that I did not feel.

"May I trouble you for your attention ?" he said, angrily.

"You are in a position to trouble me for more than that," I imprudently replied.

For a second I thought he was going to shoot me. A cool current of air from the ventilator dried the sudden perspiration on my cheek-bones. When he had mastered his fury, which was exclusively internal, he said:

"Monsieur, I have subjected myself to sneers and insinuations from an American. Our relative positions at this moment do not allow me to resent any affront from you, nor even to inform you, in suitable terms, of my opinion concerning you. But when I have the pleasure to return you your passport I shall permit myself the honour of insulting you."

"Your presence alone will accomplish that," I replied.

He controlled himself so beautifully that it occurred to me I was playing a sorry game—like a little boy making faces at a caged panther.

"Come," said I, "after all, I suppose even highwaymen are sensitive at times. I'm obliged to you for your self-control. I can't make you out, and I don't particularly care to, but I warn you frankly that if I can get my passport back I'll do it. Why," I continued, "this thing is monstrous. By Heaven! if I had a chance—only half a chance—"

"What would you do?" he asked, much interested.

"I'd blow your damned head off!" I said, gayly.

"Listen," he said; "I'll give you a chance to seek the satisfaction that certainly is yours by right. I'll fight you in a week, when and where and with whatever you please, conforming, of course, to established procedure. Now will you give me your parole?"

"No," I said, shortly.

"Why? Because you do not trust me?"

"Why should I? You rob me, and then ask me to trust you? Go to the devil!"

"Very well," he said, with tightened lips; "I shall have the greater pleasure in offering you satisfaction—a week from to-day."

"The tribute will be as unwelcome as unexpected," I said. "I don't fight duels with bandits."

"That will do!" he interrupted, in a harsh voice. "You can afford to risk it if I can."

He glanced out of the window; I made the faintest motion towards my hip, then desisted.

"I have one thing to say to you before we reach Luxembourg," he said, tossing his passport onto the cushion at my side. "It is this: don't use that passport of mine. You need not show it. I give it to you to be rid of it. In case of detention, I can't afford to have that passport found in my possession."

"I don't want it," I said; but he ignored my observation and continued:

"When we reach the station—and we'll be there shortly—contrary to custom, the gendarmes may ask for your passport. Don't show them mine. Say simply that you have lost your passport—which will be true."

"Oh, quite true."

"Which will be true," he repeated, coldly. "If you do this you will avoid serious inconvenience."

"If I don't, what then?" I asked.

"You'll find out," he said, with the faintest twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Of course I immediately made up my mind to show

his passport whether anybody asked for it or not. Naturally he would not care to have me show his passport to the police. Then it occurred to me that he certainly was not obliged to give me his passport and run the risk of my showing it. Perhaps, after all, it was to my advantage to take his strange advice.

He must have divined my perplexity, for he said: "It's good advice, take it."

Out of the corner of my eye, through the car window, I saw signs that we were approaching the city of Luxembourg: long lines of freight-cars side-tracked, signal-towers, sheds, lonesome locomotives hissing and steaming on turn-tables, and, to my great satisfaction, here and there I had a glimpse of Luxembourg gendarmes in patent-leather shakos and blue and white uniforms, patrolling a broad terraced highway that ran parallel to the railroad.

"When we arrive at the station, and the train stops," said my companion, "I'll trouble you to get out first."

"In the etiquette of precedence," I replied, cheerfully, "I submit to your revolver and to your more extensive Continental experience."

"Confound you," he burst out, with a boyish laugh, "you're not a bad fellow after all!"

"Indeed I'm not," I said, "but you may not appreciate me in a moment more."

"Are you going to get out first?"

"Yes—if you insist."

"And wait for the psychological moment when you can draw your six-shootaire?"

His affected pronunciation—for he spoke English exquisitely when he chose, revealed in a flash a cool-

ness, a self-assurance, and a subtle irony that fairly took my breath away.

"See," he said, "we are in the suburbs already. We shall be in the station in half a minute. There you will see lots of gendarmes, lots of railroad officials, lots of people, and a few soldiers on the station-platform. Are you going to shout 'Brigands! Police! Help!'"

"I will if I choose," I said.

"And you'll show my passport as exhibit A, I fancy. Eh? Documents in evidence, damning proof, and all that?"

"Perhaps."

"Better not," he said, laughing outright. His handsome face had undergone a complete transformation. Before, it had been haughty, impenetrable, often darkly furious, and always tinged with the shadow of care. Now it was the face of a boy, reckless, half laughing, glowing with color. He flushed like an eager subaltern at his first battle; he sniffed at danger and seemed to find the aroma satisfactory. He was a highwayman worthy of the name.

"Pick up my passport," he said, "and put it in your breast-pocket. Careful now!" He twirled his revolver as he spoke.

I obeyed, wondering when he was going to appropriate my watch and wallet.

The train glided under an overhanging roof—slower, slower—then stopped in the midst of a sudden tumult of cries: "Luxembourg! Luxembourg! All out for the Custom-house! Descendez, messieurs, s'il vous plaît!"

"Descendez, monsieur, s'il vous plaît," said my com-

panion, with a nervous laugh. I hesitated; his revolver flew up and almost touched my cheek.

"Turn your back. Go!" he whispered, fiercely.

I went.

But as my foot touched the asphalt platform, quick as thought I ducked behind the door, whipped out my revolver, and fired back into the compartment from which I had emerged.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW ON THE WALL

Detailing, among other things, a few reasons why stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage

Now it is one thing to fire a pistol and another thing to hit what you fire at. It is still another matter to fire at nothing and hit it; but when you fire at nothing and hit anything, the subject becomes too complex for serious discussion.

I fired, not because I saw my late companion over the Colt's sights; I merely took a justifiable snapshot, just to break the ice. I broke the car window incidentally, then stepping to the door of the dark coupé, I began to empty my weapon into the interior, expecting, of course, that my late companion would strike up a duet with me.

I was dimly conscious that a great many people around me were screaming and backing away from my neighborhood; I peered through the smoke into the coupé and saw nobody there. A second later, noticing that the opposite door swung wide open, it came to me that my larcenous companion had perhaps left the coupé at the same moment I had, but by the door opening out on the parallel railway tracks. I sprang to the step of the car, determined he should not escape; the next moment somebody seized me.

I do not now blame the gendarme who, stealing up

behind me, threw both arms around me and bawled for help, and breathed unpleasantly down my neck; I no longer harbour ill-will towards the other gendarmes and the populace of Luxembourg, who shouted and sweated and hemmed me in amid a crushing throng of excited citizens, who had all apparently been nourished exclusively with onions.

Half suffocated and crushed, I was introduced into the ladies' waiting-room, from which the ladies, resenting the introduction, promptly fled. Here people shouted at me, and I was conducted to a sidewalk black with citizens who made observations and pointed and held up little children to see me.

I angrily demanded to be heard; the police laughed. Inside the cab two gendarmes sat facing me; another took a seat at my side, and still another climbed to the box beside the coachman.

There was, truly enough, a certain pomp and circumstance attending my first entry into the city of Luxembourg, although I was not presented with the freedom of the city or any other kind of freedom. But the military escort was certainly impressive if not flattering.

"You'll get into trouble if you arrest me," I said. "I am an American citizen—Military Attaché to the United States Legation."

"So I supposed," replied one of the gendarmes. "Are you also the Grand Llama of Thibet?"

"Do you take me for a madman?" I asked, astonished.

"Either that or a German spy."

"But what would you do if I showed you a German passport?" I inquired, sarcastically.

"Confiscate it," he said.

"Remember," observed one of the fat gendarmes opposite, "that whatever statement you make now will be used against you later."

"What have I said ?" I demanded, much amused.

"You have admitted you are travelling under false pretences, and you look it !" said the other gendarme, fiercely.

"Idiots !" I thought to myself ; but I said no more until the cab stopped before a stone gateway, where a trim-looking soldier paraded, rifle balanced on his right shoulder.

"Now," thought I, "for the famous interrogation of the *procès verbal !*" and I descended jauntily from the cab, knowing that a word with any intelligent official would place things in a very different aspect.

Almost at once I found myself entering a great, square, panelled pen, in a distant corner of which a little shrunken man in tarnished uniform was apparently attempting to conceal himself behind a desk. He popped his head up, then ducked, then peeped at me around corners until I became a trifle depressed. He seemed so far away, so small, so wizened, and his uniform was so very dusty.

Uncertain and confused, I heard somebody charging some frightful criminal with murderous assault, treason, espionage, lunacy, and the inciting of riots. And presently I found out that the criminal mentioned was I.

Furious, I tried to interpose ; the wizened official instantly ducked under his desk, and I waited to see him come up again, which he did like a hell-diver, winking and shaking his head.

"What is your name?" he asked, apparently on the point of diving again.

"Will you kindly listen to my statement?" I said.

"No," he replied, "you listen to me and tell me your name."

I could only see his eyes and his two hands clutching the edge of the blotter, but I bowed ceremoniously to these fragments of official ensemble, and replied:

"My name is Gilbert Hardy—"

"Eh?" he cried.

"Hardy! Gilbert Hardy, Attaché of the American Legation."

"You are charged with meditating assassination, assault, and inciting to riot. Did you?"

"What? Riot? Nonsense! I demand to be allowed to communicate with the United States Minister."

"You fired pistols, eh?"

"At a robber who robbed me in the train."

"Eh? Where is he?"

"If your imbecile police had given me a chance I might have helped them to catch him," I replied.

The official looked blankly at me, put on a pair of glasses, looked at me again, and finally began to write, asking me question after question which I refused to answer, and which, as far as I could see, had no bearing at all on my case. He insisted that I was a German spy, and I tried in vain to convince him otherwise. Threats, persuasion, taunts were useless. I offered to show him letters, papers; he would not listen.

The gendarmes looked knowingly at each other and whispered behind their white-gloved hands.

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch ?" queried the official, with covert cunning.

"Yes," I replied in French ; "but so do you, and that doesn't prove you a German, does it ? Send to the Legation. I demand it ; do you hear ?"

He exhibited symptoms of diving again, and I hastily continued : "I am an American, and I could prove it if I had my passport."

"Oh," said the official, "then you have no passport ?"

I remembered Von Elbe's warning, and hesitated to declare that I possessed a passport not my own.

"If you are an honest man, as you say, do you wish to prefer a charge against the brigand who you claim has robbed you ?" he inquired, suspiciously. "Of course," he added, "you will be fined for shooting your pistol, for having no passport, for resisting arrest, for disturbing the peace and injuring the state railway, and for collecting a crowd. You will also pay costs—"

"What costs ?" I asked, trying to control my anger.

"The cost of the cab, monsieur."

I swallowed my wrath and nodded.

The official began to write again, pursing up his lips as though whistling, desisting occasionally to lick them and look over the rim of his spectacles at me.

"You will be escorted to the American Legation," he said, "after you describe the alleged robber. If you are what you say you are, an official apology will follow."

I gave as good a description of my late travelling companion as I could, at first sublimely unconscious that the description also applied to me. It was only

in the altered expressions of the gendarmes and the growing astonishment of the official that I became conscious of the pit I was digging for myself.

I tried to avoid describing myself, but I couldn't; for, although we were utterly unlike, the same terms identified us both.

"How tall was he?" demanded the official, now thoroughly roused to the occasion.

"About five feet seven inches," I said, getting red. I saw the gendarmes mentally calculating my height in centimetres. When they had approximated it they also betrayed excitement.

"How old was he?" faltered the official.

"About twenty-five."

"How old are you yourself?" asked the official, controlling his voice with an effort.

"How old am I?" I repeated, conscious at last that my stammering and hesitation were ruining my character. "I am twenty—let me see—I am twenty-five years old."

"What was the robber's name?"

"Stanerl Von Elbe," I said, angrily: "I warn you for the last time to let me go."

Then to my amazement a remarkable change came over the official and the gendarmes. The former climbed hastily down from his desk, skipped across the polished floor to where I stood and began to bow to me, taking little side-steps, right and left, like the first and second positions in dancing. As for the gendarmes, they stood in a row, hands raised to their shining shakos in salute, grinning and smirking until I began to believe I had entered Bedlam.

"Pardon, monsieur—a million pardons," said the

official, continuing his side-steps and bowing repeatedly; "monsieur was expected in Luxembourg; doubtless monsieur has a passport identifying monsieur. We know it—we have been informed. Alas, monsieur, we police must obey, and I beg monsieur to believe that the painful necessity of temporarily detaining monsieur is as unwelcome to me as it is to monsieur."

I looked at the little wizened officer, all glittering with dusty tinsel; I noted the grinning row of automatic gendarmes, hands resting against their polished shako-vizors. It was like a scene in a Christmas shop window.

"What the devil are you doing?" I asked, sternly.

The officer bowed, looked affable; saw I was angry, looked sad.

"Will Herr Stanerl Von Elbe have the goodness to surrender his passport for a moment?" he purred.

"Do you take me for Stanerl Von Elbe, you idiot?" I asked.

"Doubtless not, if monsieur so wishes. But the passport—"

"Oh, I have his passport, if you insist," I said, knowing it was useless to think of concealing it; and I drew it from my pocket and handed it to the officer.

Like a ripple on water a second grin ran around the room; the officer bowed low, opened the passport, and began to read it aloud, verifying each item of description by my face:

"Forehead, medium; eyes, brown; nose, very slightly upturned; mouth, medium; chin, round; hair, brown; complexion, fair; face, full; mustache, short, light brown." And then he came to the signature: "Stanerl Von Elbe."

"I am not Stanerl Von Elbe," I said, "and I am becoming tired of your stupidity."

"It is as monsieur wishes," replied the officer, with a bewildering series of bows.

"Oh, is it? Well, then, I'm Gilbert Hardy, American; Lieutenant in the Seventh United States Cavalry, sent here by my government to act as Military Attaché to my Legation. I warn you to let me go at once, or stand the consequences."

"Monsieur, it is impossible."

"Impossible? Very well. I've been robbed of my passport, threatened with a pistol, mauled by your imbecile police, and arrested. It may interest the United States to know this."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Oh, is it?"

"Absolutely," he said, with a smirk; "but it will interest Germany."

"Do you actually take me for that thug, Stanerl Von Elbe?" I demanded.

"As monsieur wishes."

"And—if I were not this Stanerl von Elbe—if I were an American officer, or an ordinary American citizen, you would release me?"

"Doubtless, monsieur."

It was then I realised that I had been foolish. In denouncing my Prussian brigand by name I had brought a hornets' nest of police about my ears. He had warned me not to—he had warned me not to show the passport—he had warned me not to make a scene. I had certainly made a scene; that led to my denouncing him by name, and that led to my giving up his passport. What was the final result to be?

"You don't intend to imprison me, I suppose?" I said, incredulously.

"Temporarily, monsieur."

"How long?"

"Monsieur knows."

"No, I don't, or I wouldn't talk to you. How long?"

"Until *they* come."

"Until *they* come?"

"Exactly."

"Who are *they?*"

"Monsieur knows."

"Damnation!" I cried, looking helplessly about. The gendarmes smirked, to a man.

And they did as they threatened; they conducted me to a room, well furnished, but barred everywhere with iron. They were decent enough to secure my luggage for me and bring it to me. In vain I showed them letters directed to me under my proper name; in vain I produced my photograph taken in New York—in vain I exhibited underwear marked G. H. They turned modestly away and grinned behind their gloved fingers. I showed them guarantees of my profession—my uniforms, my helmet, my swords. I talked English to them, I dared them to believe me a German. They looked knowing, and saluted.

"Get me my dinner then!" I said, calmly, and sat down on a sofa, utterly demoralised. As a diplomat, my future looked dubious.

Dinner was served by police-waiters—an elaborate dinner. This was grateful, and as they uncorked an excellent bottle of Burgundy, I reflected that things might have been worse after all. They brought me cigarettes and cordials; they turned down the bed-

quilts, folded my wardrobe, brought hot water, set up my folding-tub, and finally handed me the evening paper—*L'Indépendance Luxembourgeoise*—a sheet chiefly remarkable for the quality of its ink, which came off the paper when handled.

When the police-valet had retired on tiptoe, backward, I lighted a cigarette, looked at my watch, and then started on a cautious tour of the room. On the north side were two windows ornamented with bars of steel painted red. I could not see through the windows, because it was too dark outside, but I had an intuition that the windows opened on a shaft.

The west end of the room was solid stone. My bed stood there. The east wall was solid and featureless save for a wash-stand and bureau. At first, as I traversed the southern side of the room, I thought the wall was merely a blank waste of gray stone, but a moment later I noticed a shaft of brilliant light in the corridor outside, and I investigated the opening with alacrity. The orifice was not a window; it was a slit in the solid stone, about a foot long and eight inches high, like a port-hole one sees in ancient casemates. Into this narrow opening was fitted a wire screen, such as are used in kitchen windows to discourage the intrusion of flies.

I could look through the screen, which was somewhat lower than my chin, into a whitewashed hallway, where an electric light sputtered and glowed, now tinged with violet, now with the faintest rose.

There was not a soul in the corridor; one or two little gray moths darted about the electric globe, casting enormous shadows on wall and tiled floor.

I went back to the centre of the room and stood

there thinking until my legs grew tired; so I sat down on the edge of the bed. There I unlaced both shoes and threw them at the wall.

When I had bathed and donned slippers and pajamas, I reached up and turned off the two incandescent lamps suspended from the ceiling. A moment later, wishing to look at my watch again, I turned the lamps up once more—or I tried to. The keys turned but no light came. Somebody had shut off the current.

Now, as I stood there in the dark room I could look quite plainly through the wire-gauze screen where the corridor gleamed white in the electric glare outside. And I saw, on the whitewashed wall, a man's shadow, motionless. I walked noiselessly to the screen and tried to distinguish who it might be. I could only see the shadow.

"It's somebody watching me through some crevice in the wall," I thought. Then I remembered that, although from my dark room I was perfectly able to see the lighted corridor, nobody in the corridor could see me through the screen, or through any crack or peep-hole.

As I stood there, nose pressed to the wire screen, the shadow on the wall was joined by another shadow —a somewhat confused one, yet resembling the figure of a woman in a hood and long cloak. Then I heard voices—whispered voices—but every word was perfectly distinct.

"He is asleep; he has turned out the lights."

"Then you must wake him, Monsieur Giroux."

"I dare not."

"You dare not refuse."

Presently the girlish voice repeated: "You dare not refuse. Wake him, Captain Giroux."

Steps sounded near my door; I cleared the distance between me and my bed in a second and feigned sleep.

Somebody knocked.

I was silent.

The knocking came louder.

I bade my visitor enter, in a sleepy voice, and sat up in bed, striving to distinguish his features. His voice identified him as the official who had incarcerated me, and I asked him what the mischief he wanted.

"Monsieur," he whispered, "I am not, at present, the relentless, stony-hearted Captain Giroux of official life. Parbleu! I am human; I was young too, I—Giroux, if you please!"

"Well," I said, astonished, "what is that to me?"

"It is everything, monsieur. You shall see. Although as Préfet of Police in Luxembourg I am a man of iron—a man of stone, monsieur—in private life I am celebrated for my sensitive delicacy."

"It is very gratifying to know that," said I.

"Parbleu! And, although I have arrested you, although I must hold you until *they* come, although *he* has ordered it, I am not inhuman. Therefore, being a man of iron, yet celebrated for my sense of delicacy, I have let pity's counsels prevail. *She* is here!"

"Is she indeed?" I replied.

He seemed a trifle nonplussed at my calmness. "She is outside," he said; "I'll give you ten minutes alone together."

"Not here," I interposed, hastily.

"I should think not," he protested. "Hush, monsieur! If I'm caught at this it ends my official career. Don't move until I close the door; then go softly to the screen. She will be there."

I watched the door close out the faint ray of light, then I jumped up and went straight to the wire screen. A moment later the shadow on the wall stirred; I heard the rustle of a silken cloak, the echo of a light footfall, and then—and then!—close to the screen I saw a dark, lovely head and a pair of eyes to witch the universe and make saints leave home and wife and progeny. Remember that I was very young.

With a half fearful gesture she raised one small hand and laid it against the screen, palm towards me.

I touched it with my lips.

After all, I was in Luxembourg to learn what I could learn. And the Secretary of War had said: "Keep your ears and your eyes open and make yourself popular."

So I began to do so.

CHAPTER V

A SCARLET HOOD

Setting forth logically a most illogical situation, wherein insult is added to injury, and the result apparently satisfies a lady

Now as the corridor was lighted and my room was dark, and, moreover, as the screen separated us, I was in a position to observe and not be observed.

Cloaked and hooded as she was, I could still see her face—dark, oval, exquisite, framed in the scarlet lining of her hood. She was not very tall; she raised her pretty figure on tiptoe and tried vainly to distinguish my features through the screen.

As she still rested her hand against the wire-gauze frame, I improved the opportunity and chastely saluted the tip of the middle finger. The finger was loaded with jewels.

"Prison life in Luxembourg," thought I, "has its compensations. I certainly can stand this sort of incarceration." And I kissed her wrist through the screen.

She sighed; there was a rustle of silken stuffs, the click of a high-heeled shoe on the tiles.

"When are they coming?" she asked, in a hushed voice.

"I don't know," I whispered, truthfully, in reply.

She sighed again; her hood slipped back a little, showing a single curl of dark hair.

"How could you be so imprudent?" she said. "You might have known the Emperor was watching you. Could you doubt that our police were informed and on the lookout? I do not ask you if you thought of me —if you considered me in the matter. Men are selfish at best, and when passion urges them, they are downright brutal."

I listened attentively, quiet as a mouse. After all, if the police insisted I was Stanerl Von Elbe, the least I could do was to make the best of it and find out who he was. And I was doing it, not without satisfaction; for, in the account betwixt Monsieur Stanerl and myself, there was yet a long balance in his favour, and it would require more than a kiss through a screen to even it up.

"Why do you say I am brutal?" I whispered.

"Can you ask?" she replied, with spirit. "Has not our friendship given me some right to suffer if you are disgraced? Why did you come to Luxembourg? You need not answer—it would shame me to hear it. Yet I know why you came, and if an outcry is raised over this unfortunate affair all the world will know. You may not care, but think what it would be to me!"

"What would it be to you?" I asked, naïvely.

She drew back; for a moment I was afraid I had frightened her away. Presently, however, she leaned close to the screen again and said:

"By coming here I have dared more for you than I ever have for any living soul. If it were known, the world would misunderstand it. But"—and here she clinched both little fists—"but I dare you to misunderstand my visit!"

As I did not understand her visit, naturally I had

no chance to misunderstand it. I thought silence was the best policy for the moment.

"I only came," she continued, "because, perhaps, we may never meet again."

"Don't say that," I urged, with unaffected earnestness.

"It is your fault," she said; "it is the natural consequence of your rash attempt to enter Luxembourg. You must have known what you risked. You did not think it worth considering. And now all is ended."

"No, no," I protested.

"You can never again enter Luxembourg," she insisted. "Do you think the Emperor would permit it?"

"Hang the Emperor," I said.

She seemed so horrified that I said I didn't mean it.

"You are so reckless," she sighed. "You have risked all for this caprice—all!—honour, position, the confidence of a nation—and, least of all, my poor little friendship." She clinched her hands again and said, fiercely: "I am glad you can never come back—if it is the love of that woman that drags you back!"

I said nothing. What on earth was there to say?

"I defy you to misconstrue my friendship for you," she went on, rapidly. "You have not lost all sense of decency, and I know you dare not think that anything but the purest friendship has urged me to speak. Answer me."

"But," said I, grasping at what I thought must be my cue, "you know that I adore you."

The change that came over her deprived me of speech. She turned white as death, and raised one hand as though to shield herself.

"Don't look like that, for Heaven's sake," I whispered; "is it strange that I should love you? Is it wonderful that any man should love you? Show me a human creature," I cried, excitedly, "who wouldn't fall down and worship you at first sight!"

It was here that I forgot I was a diplomat.

She seemed absolutely bereft of strength. She leaned on the wall, both hands covering her face; and I saw her bosom rise and fall under the silken cloak, and her red lips quivering pitifully. As her head rested on the screen, I kissed her hair. At last she raised her head, and I saw her eyes, bright with tears, fixed on the darkness where I stood.

"What you say is an insult," she said, "yet I thank God I have heard it before I died. Now, in truth, we can never meet again. As for me, I have lived the sweetest and bitterest second a woman may know. I go away humiliated by you, thanking God for the humiliation. For I love you; and this moment ends all."

She touched her eyes with her fingers, unconsciously, like a child. The jewelled rings glimmered.

"Don't go," I stammered, overcome by what I had done, and cursing myself for a meddling ass. My idle vindictiveness, my thoughtless desire to amuse myself at Stanerl Von Elbe's expense, my inborn love for reckless diversion, had made an innocent girl miserable, perhaps for life. Nor had I the faintest idea why she should be unhappy, nor did I know how to repair the results of my imbecile thoughtlessness.

"Why should you go?" I said, determined to tell her who I really was. But she moved back from the

screen with a gesture of horror, and I hesitated to announce my identity at the top of my voice.

"Come to the screen," I urged, "I beg of you. Listen—I implore you to grant me one moment more. It is your duty."

"Duty," she said; "my duty is not to you but to my husband."

"Oh, Lord," I thought, "there's a husband too!"

Suddenly she stepped to the window again; I caught the flash of a tiny dagger, there came a harsh sound of ripping, then, through the slash in the wire gauze, her hand appeared, holding out a ring.

"Take it," she whispered; "don't forget me."

I seized her hand; the ring fell into my palm.

"Don't forget me," she panted; "if I am selfish I cannot help it. I cannot bid you forget me. If you loved another and were happy it would kill me. I only know one kind of love, the love that desires possession, the love that is not ashamed, the love that is jealous! I can endure the years to come—if you love me; I cannot if you forget."

She drew her hand away. "I am a wife; you are free, you have the world to choose from. Yet, hopeless, separate from you forever, I bid you love me! It is not your happiness that I would die for; it is your happiness in me—in me—that I could give my life for. If that is a selfish love—at least it is love. And love is the rarest thing in the world!"

She bent her head closer to the screen: "And a rare thing in the world is a rebellious heart and a blameless life. That is what my love means also."

She was sobbing now.

"I am too weak to struggle against loving you; I

am too selfish to wish you happiness in another's love; I am too pure to sin through my love for you. If then this love of mine is an unworthy thing, it is a woman's love—it is her soul, body, and hope of heaven, her waking thought, her dream, her dying memory. I have never had it from my husband; I give it to you; I ask it from you!"

The next moment a heavy scraping sounded on the tiles close at hand; there came the shuffle of feet, a murmur, a voice:

"Where is the Préfet?"

"Here," quavered Giroux, from my doorway, hastening through the hall.

"Madame! madame!" he whispered, "they have come. This is madness!"

"I am going," she said, quietly. She turned and looked full at the screen behind which I stood. I shall never forget her face.

The next instant she had vanished, and a moment later a confused procession of shadows passed across the white wall before me and I heard the murmur of voices at my door.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY

Containing a revelation, concerning two people, which I had no business to hear

SNUGLY tucked away in bed, I drew the sheets up above my chin until nothing of me remained visible except my eyes. I heard knocking at the door, but paid no heed. Whoever was outside, knocking at my door, had come, no doubt, to pump me concerning Stanerl Von Elbe—that I felt certain of—and I had already made up my mind to remain silent. "For," thought I, "I have done enough damage to my friend, the enemy, and incidentally to the young lady in the scarlet hood, and I'm sorry I found it impossible to mind my own business."

About this time the door opened. Looking over the edge of the sheets I saw Captain Giroux enter the room, carrying a lighted lamp, followed closely by two strangers.

Giroux tiptoed towards my toilet-table, set the lamp there, looked at the bed where I lay, caught my eye, and sidled forward with a deprecating gesture.

"They have come, monsieur," he said, apparently ill at ease; "they have arrived this moment from the frontier."

"It's very thoughtful of them," I replied, "and you

can send them back again at your convenience. Am I going to get any sleep, or not ?"

"Monsieur," protested Giroux, casting appealing glances at the two strangers, who, hats in hand, stood at the door, "I cannot refuse to receive these gentlemen."

"I can," I said. "I'm going to sleep."

"But," stammered Giroux, hopping from one foot to the other in his anxiety, "this is Herr Wiepert and this is Herr Vossburg."

"Don't know 'em," I said, shortly.

Wiepert, the tall, red-eyed fellow, fixed a pair of sepulchral eyes on me and wagged his head.

"By the Emperor's orders," he said, entering the room.

The other, Vossburg, a living caricature of an untidy Santa Claus, began to titter in a high, cracked voice, repeating, "Yes, yes, by the Emperor's orders—te-he ! te-he-he !"

Wiepert, holding his black-banded hat like an undertaker who assists at the last sad rites, glided solemnly towards Giroux, who immediately backed away. Wiepert, however, cornered him, and I heard them muttering and fumbling with a batch of papers, most of which bore red, black, and gold ribbons and seals. And all the while old Father Christmas, or Vossburg, kept his pale, red-rimmed, watery eyes on me.

At first glance his white hair and silvery beard, his ruddy round cheeks and symmetrical features, had impressed me as hale, kindly old age always impresses the young. The next second I was conscious of something sinister in the old man's face, something

uncanny, almost repulsive. His frowsy hair and beard were not clean white; they were unpleasantly fluffy, like chemically treated wool on toy sheep. His eyes were slitted and sly; he peered with them furtively. His ruddy cheeks, too, were all streaked and distended with purple veins, and his stocky body seemed too puffy for his thin short legs.

Looking up at him I said, without emotion: "I don't like you, Father Christmas—no, I don't, and I wouldn't trust you with a button, so you had much better go away."

He tittered in his thin, cracked voice, but said nothing; and presently Wiepert stole noiselessly to my bedside, bearing a bundle of documents as though he carried a floral offering to a tomb.

"By the Emperor's orders," he said again, dropping his black eyes to the bundle of papers, then stealing a reproachful glance at me.

"By whose orders?" I asked.

"By the Emperor's orders," he repeated, "your Highness is under arrest."

I lay perfectly still.

"Your Highness is doubtless aware," continued Wiepert, "that his Majesty knows all. His Majesty, the Emperor, therefore summons your Highness to Berlin without delay."

After a moment I said: "For whom do you take me?"

"For Herr Stanerl Von Elbe, if your Highness insists," said Wiepert, cringing low, and preparing to further abase himself.

"I don't insist," I said; "tell me who else I am."

Vossburg leered at me and chuckled; Wiepert, at

first confused, recovered his composure and, unrolling Stanerl's passport, read the description of the bearer without comment.

"Well," I said, patiently, "whom does that passport describe?"

"It appears to describe your Highness," quavered old Vossburg, his purple-veined cheeks swelling with suppressed chuckles.

"Tell me for whom you take me," I said, sharply, "and hurry about it, or I shall turn over and go to sleep!"

Wiepert, much disconcerted, looked at Giroux, then, bending close to my pillow, muttered:

"We all know you to be his Highness Prince Edric, of Prussia."

For ten minutes I lay there in speechless astonishment, covered to the eyes with the bedclothes, trying to comprehend clearly what was best to do. That I had placed Stanerl Von Elbe, or rather, Prince Edric, of Prussia, in a most embarrassing position was clear enough. Who, then, could the young lady in the scarlet hood have been? Surely not the beautiful Luxembourg peasant girl, for whom people said Prince Edric had honourable intentions, notwithstanding the grief that such intentions caused the German Emperor. So, after all, my highwayman was an honourable man, probably driven to desperation by the telegram I saw him reading, warning him he was to be arrested on reaching Luxembourg.

If he had only told me why he needed my passport I would have given it to him gladly. More than that, I would have openly courted arrest to give him a chance to get out of the city.

Now I had succeeded in poking my nose into matters that did not concern me; I had impersonated Prince Edric and kissed a young lady in a scarlet hood and told her I adored her—a pleasant prospect for Prince Edric.

Out of the corner of one eye I watched Wiepert and old Vossburg. They were nosing about the room, peeping at my trunk and satchel, while Captain Giroux paced to and fro before the door, arms folded, head bent.

"Captain!" I called.

He started, then came to the bedside like a guilty hound.

"So you arrested me and held me for the Emperor's bailiffs?"

"Highness!"—he protested.

"Don't be frightened; wait until I give you reason for fright. Who was that lady who came here an hour ago?"

Giroux's eyes opened appealingly.

"Tell me," I repeated.

"Your Highness knows as well as I."

"Never mind! Tell me."

But Giroux, casting a horrified glance at me, fled to the corridor, where he alternately stood on either foot and peeped through the door at intervals.

"I can't stand this," I muttered, and I sat up in bed and turned my face full on Wiepert and Vossburg.

"Am I Prince Edric, of Prussia?" I demanded.

The effect on old Vossburg was most unpleasant; he squeaked like a startled rat. As for Wiepert, he gaped at me, opening and shutting his lantern-jaws until I hurled a pillow at him.

"Who are you?" stammered Wiepert, too amazed to avoid the pillow.

"None of your business!" I said. "Take that evil old man and go, or I'll throw you out!"

I should not have taken such a tone; I understood it a moment later; for old Vossburg began to chatter and mouth and point at me, and Wiepert scowled until his dull eyes were almost buried under his swarthy brows.

"Where is the Prince?" he said, harshly.

"Go to the devil!" I retorted. The next second he seized me, and I struggled out of bed and dealt him a sharp, clean blow that made him howl. Then, to my amazement, old Vossburg caught me in a grip of steel. In vain I writhed and wriggled, not wishing to do violence to an old man. But his age was a deception; his thin, unsteady legs grew rigid as iron, and his trembling, puffy hands held me like vices.

"One movement and I'll throttle you," he snarled. His sheep's-wool hair and beard, his purple face, his moist, sly eyes—his whole loathsome mask of aged benignity suddenly became horrible to me. I twisted and tugged, striving to escape from his repulsive grip; I could not budge an inch.

Giroux, who had run into the room, danced about us, wringing his hands. Wiepert, instantaneously decorated with a promising black eye, moaned and ground his teeth.

"Let go!" I panted, shrinking from the old creature; "let go or I'll forget your age, I tell you!"

His answer was to hurl me bodily against the wall—a most unpleasant sensation, but welcome because it freed me from his revolting proximity.

"As for you," quavered Vossburg, mouthing and grimacing at Giroux, who stood petrified by the bed—"as for you, you thick-headed Luxembourg ass, you'll hear from the Emperor, and from your own sovereign too! You've let the Prince escape and arrested his Yankee valet. You fool!"

"By Heaven!" I said, "if you were not the old bag of wool and bones that you are, I'd take a stick to you as substitute for your Emperor!"

"Lèse Majeste!" bawled Wiepert. "Arrest him!—hold him—"

I picked up a riding-crop and started for Wiepert, who promptly dodged behind old Vossburg.

The impossibility of raising a hand against Vossburg's discoloured white head, the knowledge that those puffy purple hands and palsied legs concealed almost superhuman strength, left me helpless. He was more than a match for me, yet, without affectation, I say now that had it not been for his age I should have sailed into all three of them without reflection.

He leered at me, and laughed his cracked falsetto laugh.

"The Yankee valet—te-he! te-he!—the Emperor shall know that too—yes, yes, the Emperor!"

I said, more calmly: "If you want to avoid trouble, you had better leave this room, otherwise the American Minister might make inquiries why a couple of German flunkies should cause an American officer to be arrested by a Luxembourg policeman."

Wiepert, whose eye was already a splendid study in thunder-cloud tints, shook his fist at me, then at Giroux, and left the room. Old Vossburg crinkled

his hands up like claws, and fairly pranced with fury.

"Very well," he squealed, "we shall know what to do—the Emperor will know what is to be done. Captain Giroux, you are responsible for the escape of his Highness. You will hear of this later, te-he!—yes, later—all in good time, Captain Giroux."

And suddenly becoming an old man again, he tottered away, laughing his shrill, cracked, treble laugh until the last echo died away far down the white-washed corridor.

I looked uncertainly at Giroux. He returned my gaze, at first blankly; then fury seized him, and he drew his sabre and shook it in my face.

"How dared you—how dared you impersonate the Prince?" he shouted, choking with passion and fright.

"You fool," I said, "didn't I tell you I was not Von Elbe?"

"Do you know who the lady was?" he howled, threatening me with his sabre. "I'm ruined! Do you know who she was, you crazy Yankee?"

"No," I said, keeping clear of his sabre; "and if you touch me with your sword I'll settle you once and for all, you little Belgian manikin!"

After a few moments' passionate dancing, he sheathed his sabre and began to weep; tears trickled over his gold-laced tunic; he wiped his eyes on a gold-banded cuff.

"It's your own fault," said I, sitting down on the edge of the bed; "I'm sorry I interviewed the young lady in the scarlet hood; I'm sorry I kissed her—"

"The Duchess!" he shrieked, bounding up. "You kissed the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg!"

"The Duchess!" I gasped.

He tried to scream; terror paralysed him.

"Idiot!" I said, "I kissed my hand to her. Do you understand your native tongue? If you do, hold it."

Nevertheless the enormity of my offence—for I had kissed the Duchess again when she gave me the ring—made me a trifle light-headed.

"Here," said I to myself, "ends my promising diplomatic career."

Meanwhile Giroux held his head in one hand and beat it with the other at intervals.

I leaned over and shook him by both shoulders until his spurs jingled.

CHAPTER VII

THIS AMUSING WORLD!

Being a further history of my interference with other people's business, and other people's interference with mine, and incidentally treating of an absurdly logical paradox

"CAPTAIN GIROUX," I said, "when you have finished your contortions I'll have a word or two with you."

At first he was too panic-stricken to listen, but I finally quieted him, shoved him into an arm-chair and placed a cigar in his mouth. He sucked it spasmodically and rolled his yellow, frightened eyes at me.

I said: "This is a very serious matter. You have arrested and imprisoned an officer of the United States Army, which is a much more dreadful thing than you suspect—a great deal more dreadful, for example, than my kissing the Grand Duchess Eulalie, of Luxembourg—had I done so."

He began to moan again, but I found a match and lighted the cigar in his mouth, which stopped him.

He seemed so helpless, so unreal, so tinselled and irresponsible that I felt like saying, "You have been a very, very naughty policeman; I've half a mind to put you back in the closet."

"You see," I continued, "I know you are sorry now, and although I am inclined to be angry, it is possible that I might forgive you."

"That isn't the trouble," he said, "but if the Duchess finds out—"

"The Duchess won't find out," I interrupted, sharply, "unless you tell her."

He shook his head and emitted sounds.

"Of course," I said, "you could ruin me by confessing to the Duchess."

"I won't ruin you if you don't ruin me," he muttered; "but I know how men boast about women."

"Imbecile," I said, frowning, "do honourable men ever discuss women?"

"They do in Germany," he said, sulkily; "there's Count Herbert—"

"There is a difference," said I, "between Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum, contemporary opinion to the contrary. You know the proverb—'Prussians are connecting links between Frenchmen and human beings.'"

Apparently my suggestion reassured him; he sucked comfort out of his cigar and eyed me more hopefully.

"Now," said I, "sleep, for me, is out of the question. It is morning, anyway. I am going to dress; you are going to have my luggage sent to the United States Legation. After that, if you and your absurd toy-shop of a country behave yourselves, nobody will be the wiser for this night's misunderstanding. But," I continued, "if you or your nicely varnished brother toys interfere with me again, I'll stir up my government and then you'll all certainly go to smash."

He seemed considerably affected; I saw he was preparing to use his gilt-slashed cuff.

"Don't you dare weep again!" I added, hastily; "there is going to be no trouble if you mind your

own affairs with half the enthusiasm that you have minded mine."

"What shall I say when the Duchess questions me?" he asked, in a shaky voice.

"About what?"

"About my prisoner?"

"You'll lie," I said.

"Lying is disgusting," I continued, "except among diplomats. This is certainly a diplomatic incident. However, you may do the lying."

"I don't mind," he said, innocently, "only I can't invent any way for you to escape."

"Can't you? Well, I'll manage that. There's no liar like a truthful man, believe me. See, it's daylight already. Go and get me a cab, and send my luggage to the Legation while I am dressing. When you come back I'll show you how to lie truthfully, my friend."

He went away, trusting implicitly in my capacity for untruthfulness, and I started to shave, turning out the electric lights, for daylight already flooded the room and I could see perfectly in the mirror. While I was shaving, two railway porters came and took away my luggage.

I finished my toilet, dressed carefully, turned down the bed-linen, selected a nice strong pair of sheets, and deliberately ripped them into long strips. When I had fashioned some home-made ropes out of these, I sat down again on the edge of the bed and waited for Captain Giroux.

He came presently to announce the cab. I rose, displaying the ropes.

"I know," he said, while a pale flicker of intelli-

gence lighted up his foolish face. "You're going to tie them to the bars at the window. That will be funny."

"Nonsense!" I said. "Nobody would believe I squeezed through those iron bars. I know something funnier yet. Come here."

"What are you going to do?" he asked, uneasily.

I started for him; he ran, but I caught him before he reached the door. Then, despite kicks and screams, I tied the Préfet of Police to the bedpost and swathed him like a mummy from head to toe.

"Now," I said, "they will believe you when you tell them I did this. It will be true also, which ought to console you."

He made a great many kinds of noise; I told him he was ungrateful.

"I am a man," said I, "celebrated for the delicacy of my disposition, and if you will stop bleating long enough, I will place a cigar in your mouth and light it."

He did not appear to care for it, but I placed the cigar in his mouth, lighted it, thanked him for my night's lodging, and went out cheerfully, slamming the iron door.

Down-stairs, under a gray stone archway, I found the cab. Some policemen aided me to mount. I thanked them, and gave the address:

"American Legation, No. 7 Boulevard du Viaduc. Drive fast!"

The sun was well up as we crossed the railroad tracks and came out behind the station. I drew a deep breath of clean sweet air—oh, how sweet it blew from the meadows where the cattle stood, chest deep,

in tall Belgian clover, purple and carmine, silvered by the dew!

Then, as we rounded the freight sheds, the city burst into view—Luxembourg, terraced and girdled with white walls, a fragment of the middle ages swimming in pale sunshine; an unreal city in commonplace, wearied Europe; a mirage of romance in a sordid world.

There it glimmered, crowning the plateau, spire and dome and tiled roof sparkling in the sun, the tinted morning shadows playing over bastion and wall, fortified causeway, battlement, and barbette.

On three sides of the city the perpendicular rock fell away hundreds of feet sheer, where, deep below in the ravine, I heard water gushing over stones, and the sigh and sough of the wind through the hidden foliage.

"It is the Alzette River we hear, monsieur," said the coachman, leaning over and pointing down the gorge. "The lower city lies there below; the city on the rocks above was but a citadel in former days."

"Drive slowly," I said, under my breath, for the spell of the scene was upon me.

Exquisite, unreal, the terraced heights, over which raced the shadows of white clouds, seemed deserted; empty and tenantless watch-tower and parapet; the vague city silent and hushed as in strange mazed dreams of sorcery. And it was sorcery, this miraged land of miniatures, this frail fantastic city, this rocky gorge where a painted stream foamed under painted trees, where quaintly lined houses and mills with little wheels turning gave to the composition its naïve and delicate monotony.

And now we came nearer, and as we drove onto the great viaduct that spans the ravine from the railroad to the city, I saw the ruin that lay over all—the ghost of former power and strength, the mockery of dismantled battlement, turret, and barbette.

For the walled causeway was defenceless; the loop-holed gate-lodge but a shell; the cannon that turned their flaring muzzles to the south were ancient bits of green bronze, laboriously wrought and chased, sunk to the chiseled trunnions in mouldy oaken blocks.

And now I saw people: fresh-faced girls, bearing tin milk-pails, flocked across the bridge; trim soldiers in blue and scarlet marched briskly two by two, about somebody's business—perhaps their own. Deep in the ravine below ducks quacked and flapped white pinions; the churning splash of turning mill-wheels, the softened concord of voices, the sigh and whisper and stir of leafy depths through which tiny houses gleamed, and the blue sky over all—this was Luxembourg as I entered the causeway—a whole toy-store come to life, a naïve water-colour with mechanical mill-wheels and rocking boats, an enchanted Noah's ark collection, trees, cattle, and people newly painted. I could almost sniff glue and varnish in the aromatic August breeze.

Then into this impossible landscape, this absurdly delightful paradox of a country, came a relic of yesterday—a horse-car, jingling serenely over the bridge towards the city, carrying a single passenger. A young girl, with dainty Dresden-china features, held up one rosy porcelain finger; the car stopped, she got in, then jingle! jingle! jingle! it moved mechanically on towards the walls of that enchanted, that ex-

quisitely irrational actuality — the city of Luxembourg.

If a great hand had suddenly descended from above and gathered up city, trees, and people, and laid them back in their boxes, it would scarcely have surprised me.

But now we drove slowly into the city itself, through a gateway where two prettily uniformed soldiers smoked scented cigarettes; and I saw before me an unpaved square like a country market-place, alive with pink-cheeked women whose wooden shoes clicked like the interminable rhythm of castanets as they moved through rows of stands heaped high with very green vegetables. Everywhere colour and grace and gracious gesture, everywhere subdued and discreet movement, and the fresh aroma of starched linen.

A graceful girl in blue, with a lace collarette and cambric head-dress, gave me a look. I wondered why even the cab-horse did not stop. I tried to, but the cabman turned abruptly to the left under the pedestal of the prancing bronze battle-horse, incidentally encumbered with some forgotten Grand Duke of Luxembourg, and we entered a boulevard, skirting the ramparts. This boulevard was another surprise; it looked like a bit of Paris, handsome, modern, elegant, and spotless. There were houses only on one side; on the other, terraces, from below which sheer cliffs fell away. Nurse-maids rolled baby-carriages up and down the sidewalks; a street-sweeper, eyes closed, apparently slumbering upright, played a hose over the asphalt. Even the English sparrows seemed subdued and decorous; there was no loud, vulgar chirping, no impudent chatter, no dusty squabbles; each bird minded his own business, and followed the fat

ash-coloured pigeons with admiring eyes, as those over-fed birds waddled round and round in the eternal ornithological quest for nourishment.

I knew this was the Boulevard du Viaduc—I had seen the name neatly printed in white on the corner house.

In a few moments the cab stopped in front of an immaculate house, bearing the number 7, and over the door I saw a newly gilded eagle and shield, and a newly painted flag-pole, decorated with two brand-new ropes. I descended, gave the cabman a generous tip, told him to behave himself always and fear God, and went towards the door, at which already a flunky stood.

A moment later a big, laughing, reckless-eyed youth came into the hallway, saying: "Hello, Hardy, old sport! Glad to see you, old gilt-and-buttons! I've put a cocktail and the cellar keys on your bureau. Pull the blue cord in the corner when you're ready, and please don't wink at the maid."

It was Victor Osborne, First Secretary to his Excellency the American Envoy, Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

"Don't be funny," I said. "Where's the Minister?"

"Gone to The Hague with the whole outfit—except me. There's a row on with William the Sudden. Wash your face and come down-stairs, and I'll tell you about it."

It only needs a pair of Yankees in a country to knock the romance out of it.

If it is true that any Americans have settled in heaven, it may be spoiled within the next few years—like Japan.

CHAPTER VIII

BREAKFAST AND BANTER

Showing how a bet may be won and yet leave the winner out of pocket; also why maidens should not put their trust in princes, neither in the sons of men

We breakfasted about eleven, Osborne and I, in the sunny morning-room adjoining the conservatory.

He had changed very little since we left West Point, he to resign and play with politics, I to enter the cavalry and learn to covet dead men's shoes.

"The service is too slow," he said, chipping an egg and glancing wistfully at me; "I couldn't have stood the stagnation. Dead men's shoes are not so repulsive in politics; their owners are only dead politically, you know."

Through the open window I heard the wind in the trees; I saw the swallows sheering the cliff across the street; I heard the melody of the Alzette tinkling through the ravine. The bizarre beauty of everything preoccupied me.

"Yes, everything is pretty in this futile country," said Osborne. "To prevent his Excellency's mind from wandering I tried to engage homely house-maids. There were none in Luxembourg."

"Victor," said I, "why on earth did they send that man out here?"

"Oh, his Excellency? He harmonizes with the

landscape," said Osborne. "You ought to see him when his whiskers are combed out like the white frill on a pouter-pigeon."

We lighted cigars and moved our chairs to the balcony. An exceedingly trim maid, with obtrusively satisfactory ankles, removed the breakfast dishes. Somehow or other the atmosphere of the whole legation struck me as frivolous; the rococo mirrors, the slim twisted candle-sticks, the gilded chairs and sofas, all seemed part and parcel of the dainty absurdity of the city. And those pink and white maids with their china-blue eyes and lace caps—they belonged in stage boudoirs; they should be dancing delicate dances in the lightest of light musical comedies, bathed in the prismatic reflections of crystal chandeliers.

"Oh, you'll get used to it," observed Osborne; "everything's pretty here, everything is irresponsible and artistically reasonable. Here we all

> "'Take the cash and let the credit go;
> Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum.'"

"Tell me, seriously," I said, "just how the land lies in this Christmas-pantomime country."

"You don't want to be serious so soon after breakfast?" he protested.

"Yes, I do. The very air here makes me feel foolish, like sweet champagne. If we don't talk sense I'll become as trivial as the rest of you."

"Well," he said, "I will lecture on modern history, then. This is all I know: William the Sudden has fished out of his archives a lot of old wills and grants and treaties, which he is pasting together to suit his ends. It seems that in 1883, in Holland, fear of ab-

sorption by Germany was excited by the fact that, in case of the death of the feeble Prince of Orange, the only male heir was Prince Albert, of Prussia. Prince Albert was a claimant through maternal descent from King William I., of Holland. Then came a grand mix-up; Prince Albert, of Prussia, cited the case of William I., of Prussia, who was a grandson of the old Stadtholder Frederick Henry. But that claim, it seems, was settled way back in 1732. At any rate, the Kaiser is perfectly possessed to get hold of Luxembourg, if not of Holland. He wants to compromise, but he has a clear-headed little lady, with a mind of her own, to deal with—I mean Wilhelmina, of Holland."

"She mobilised the reserve," I said.

"You bet she did!" cried Osborne, enthusiastically. "Here's a diplomatic secret; what do you think his Sudden Majesty of Germany tried to do? He magnanimously offered her a husband to be selected and specially blessed by himself."

"No!" I said, disgusted. "What did the little Queen of Holland say?"

"She said something very saucy—she said it in rhyme, too; his Excellency saw it. Translated it read: "'Where the old cat crawls through, the kittens may follow; where the kittens crawl through, the old cat may climb over the fence.'"

"Which meant," I said, laughing, "that a Prussian princeling once in Holland, the old cat Kaiser might walk over the frontier."

"Exactly, and pocket Luxembourg. Oh, she's a bonnie little queen, Wilhelmina, and as sweet and pretty as she is clever. And to think of a coarse-fibred Prussian—"

"That reminds me," I interrupted. "Prince Edric, of Prussia, is in Luxembourg."

"In prison," added Osborne, with an air that said plainly, "Don't try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs."

"Who told you so?" I asked.

"The police, of course," yawned my too clever comrade.

"Well," I said, pitilessly, "you have been gulled; they got the wrong man, and Prince Edric has gone a-wooing his ladye fayre. I see, Victor, that you need mature advice in your first diplomatic essay."

He took it fairly well; it was something of a dig, though, and perhaps I laughed a little louder than necessary.

"How did you find that out?" he asked, wincing.

"The police, of course," I yawned.

It was too bad to rub it in; but, on the other hand, I had no intention of revealing to him the fact of my incarceration; I should never have heard the last of it.

"I'm going to wire his Excellency," said Victor. "He might as well know that Edric is in Luxembourg. Everybody thinks it's for a peasant girl, but it may be some Prussian plot that the Sudden One is hatching."

"Wire ahead," I said; "only I happen to know that the Kaiser is furious, and has sent two spies or sheriffs, or some species of Teuton reptile, after Edric."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Osborne, pretending to be overcome at my precocity; "and what may their names be, my omniscient young friend?"

"Wiepert and Vossburg," I replied, concealing my triumph with a half-yawn.

Osborne looked up quickly.

"Confound it, Gilbert," he said; "you have been in Luxembourg an hour or so, and you know more already than I do. Who told you about Wiepert and old Vossburg?"

"They are friends of mine," I said, calmly. "If I learn anything of interest to the government I'll tell you, my son."

Osborne, a trifle angry, but laughing, rose and stepped out on the balcony. I followed, still smoking.

"Those two spies have been hanging around town ever since I came here," he said. "They watch our legation; they haunt the barracks, the council-chamber, the palace. Why? Lord knows; I can't make out what they want unless it's that 'general information' so dear to the German government."

"At present," I said, "they're after Prince Edric with a warrant of arrest in the name of the Kaiser."

There was a silence. I tossed my cigar over the railing, and watched it fall and lie smoking among the scarlet geraniums in the court-yard.

"Do you suppose Edric means to renounce his titles and pretences and marry that peasant girl?" asked Osborne.

"I believe he is capable of it," I said; "I believe the Kaiser thinks him capable of it."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because I myself believe Prince Edric would stop at nothing."

"What do you know of Prince Edric?" asked Osborne, much amused.

"More than you think I do," I replied, "and more than I'm going to tell you."

"Perhaps you know him?"

"Perhaps I do."

"Come, Gilbert," he said, "don't be idiotic. I'm going to write to his Excellency now. You might take a stroll down by the barracks and inspect the Luxembourg army; it's all there, the whole battalion. Go and begin your prowling. A legation is only a diplomatic name for a nest of spies, you know."

He sauntered back into the room, a little piqued I fancy, puzzling his brains over my apparent sources of knowledge.

"By-the-way, Victor," I called to him as he left the balcony, "when am I to be presented to the Grand Duke and Duchess?"

"When they come back to town," he replied.

"But the Duchess is here now," I said, unable to forego the opportunity.

"No, she isn't," he answered.

I went into the room where he stood by the hall-door.

"I'll bet you she's in town," I said.

"Take you," he replied, promptly.

"Box of cigars?"

"Done. Prove it."

Now I had forgotten that I could not honourably prove it. I thought a moment, then said:

"I saw her, Victor."

"Mistake," he said, briefly.

"Then prove it yourself," I retorted.

He picked up the morning paper, *L'Indépendance Luxembourgeoise*, and searched a moment.

"Here," he said. "'Court news.—His Highness the Grand Duke Athel, Her Highness the Grand Duchess Eulalie, Mademoiselle Bettina d'Yssel, and the Countess of Wilverwiltz have been for three days at the Château Wilverwiltz for the golf tournament.'"

"What paper is that?" I demanded.

"This morning's paper."

"It's an asinine sheet," I said; "and you can have your cigars when you want them."

"I thought you'd drown in your sea of knowledge," he observed. And he went away, singing under his breath:

"A man's an ass as goes to sea,
At him I do deride;
But woman is a tender flower,
And delicate inside."

I picked up hat, gloves, and stick, and departed, vexed that I had lost not only my bet but also my prestige with Osborne as a possessor of sources of information.

As I strolled across the street I thought of my adventure of the night before.

"Nevertheless," I muttered, "the Duchess was in town last evening, and he can make the most of his cigars."

Now that I knew the court was away, I began to feel that the city was dull. Of course at first I found the city itself interesting; I strolled through it from the Plat d'Altmünster to the Rue Vauban, from the Avenue Marie-Thérèse, through the Boulevard du Prince and Boulevard du Roi, to the theatre. I inspected the beautiful library, the Chamber of Deputies, Palais de Justice, Cathedral, and the churches

of Saint-Cunnégonde and Saint-Quirin. Then I had enough of antiquities, so I went to the market-square where the fresh-faced peasant girls thronged the sidewalks, and looked sideways at me until I thought I had better go to the Café Metzler and order something with ice in it. Yet it was true that the town lacked gayety. The handsome quarters were silent, deserted save by a nurse-maid or two sitting on the benches beside beardless soldiers. Truly a city of sixteen thousand inhabitants needed at least a grand duke and a court to make it endurable.

Now if there had been plenty of military about I should not have found it dull; but the total garrison consisted of the entire Luxembourg army—a battalion of infantry and a wandering sprinkling of gendarmes. The fortifications, interesting because Vauban constructed some of them, were neither modern nor of any immediate military consequence. Yet it was easy to understand how this fortified city had once been the strongest fortress in the world, except Gibraltar. For although by the treaty of London in 1867 the fortifications were demolished, so great a part of them were hewn out of the solid rock that, even now, with a little industry and a few machine-guns, the city could be made intensely interesting to any assaulting force. With money and time the city could be even made worthy, as a citadel, of its ancient title, the "Key to France." And it is true to-day that any country holding Luxembourg, reconstructed as a fortress of the first class, would possess the only logical base from which France could be successfully invaded from the north.

Antiquated defences and small armies soon satisfy

the curiosity of the modern soldier, and, apart from the projects that naturally shaped themselves in my mind for the defence of a defenceless city, I found little to amuse or instruct me in Luxembourg military matters. Besides, I was a cavalry officer, and I observed with sufficient tolerance the delving of engineers, the calculations of artillerists, and the confabs of owl-eyed infantry experts.

While I stood on the viaduct, examining the battered relics of ancient defence, Osborne joined me, swinging a cane.

"Anything in your line?" he asked, banteringly. "Given the length of a ship and the height of the main-mast, find the age of the captain's cat—eh?"

I did not answer; I was inspecting a young man who had just crossed the bridge and who now, traversing the street, entered the Rue d'Eau at a lively pace.

Unless I was blinder than the white bat of Drumgoole, that man was Stanerl Von Elbe—Prince Edric, of Prussia.

"Why the devil don't you answer me when I speak to you?" inquired Osborne.

"Wait till you're a big boy," I replied, and left him there, mouth open.

The man ahead of me was certainly Prince Edric. He walked along at a rapid pace with that erect yet not ungraceful carriage peculiar to many Prussian officers.

There were plenty of people in the Rue d'Eau, so I found it easy to follow him without attracting his attention. As he walked he kept glancing up at the signs on the shops as though searching for some num-

ber; I kept him in view without difficulty, wondering why he dared show himself so openly in the streets of Luxembourg.

Once he stopped at a book-store window, apparently fascinated by some photographs. Presently he entered the store; I went to the window and, while pretending to examine the display of photographs for sale, kept one eye on Prince Edric. I noticed, among the photographs, portraits of actresses, emperors, prize cattle, and demi-mondaines.

Tucked away in a corner Bismarck stared through a thin film of dust. The slight cast in his prominent eyes always fascinated me, like the outward turn one sees in the eyes of well-bred pug-dogs. William the Sudden was there between some views of the famous Luxembourg cattle-show—stalled bulls, prize hogs, and two-headed calves.

But the important pictures in the window were, of course, portraits of the Grand Duke and Duchess and the lovely Queen of Holland. Wilhelmina was everywhere in every costume; the Grand Duchess, radiant in her youthful beauty, appeared in court costume, in riding habit, in waterproof and cape. I should never have recognised her. As for the Grand Duke, he was duplicated and re-duplicated in all the uniforms imaginable. He was apparently more times a colonel in European crack regiments than there were men in the entire Luxembourg army.

When Prince Edric came out of the shop I turned my back. He would not have seen me anyway, for he continued down the Rue d'Eau, still searching the signs on the shops.

It took me only a moment to enter the book-store,

find out what Prince Edric had bought, and return to follow him.

His Highness had purchased sixteen photographs of Queen Wilhelmina, of Holland.

"Oh, peasant maid of Luxembourg," I thought, "put not your trust in princes—neither in the sons of men."

CHAPTER IX

THE RING

Proving that no man can guess in cold blood what he might do in a passion

When at last Prince Edric found the number he was searching for, I entered the shop at his heels, and as he took his place in a line of people before a railing I stood behind him, indifferent now as to discovery, determined, as soon as he had finished his business, to have a chat with him on matters interesting to us both.

The place was an information bureau for tourists and travellers, a ticket-office for railroads, and a general rendezvous where commercial men and other voyagers might find foreign newspapers, time-tables, and directories. There were also conveniences for changing foreign money into Luxembourg coinage, commission strictly according to the quoted rate of exchange.

The waiting line of men moved up little by little until at length Prince Edric stood at the *guichet*, and the agent looked questioningly down at him from behind the railing.

"I should like a ticket, first-class, to Wilverwiltz," said Prince Edric, politely returning the agent's mechanical inclination.

The agent opened a drawer, found the ticket, stamped it, tore off half, stamped that, wrote on both

halves, punched them, and handed one to Prince Edric. Wilverwiltz was only ten miles away.

"I suppose the diligence still runs between Wilverwiltz and Saint-Yssel?" said Prince Edric, laying a silver piece on the desk.

"No, monsieur. The Saint-Yssel Chasse is closed."

"But the Forester's lodge is still there, of course?" inquired Prince Edric, nervously.

"His Highness, the Grand Duke, has closed it permanently," replied the agent.

The Prince seemed so taken aback that the agent added: "Van Tassel, the head forester, died last winter."

"But his niece?" blurted out the Prince, impatiently.

"Intelligence concerning the head forester's niece is not included in the information distributed by this bureau," replied the agent, coldly.

"But I wish to find the niece of the Duke's head forester," said the Prince, in a firm voice.

"Apply to the police, monsieur. And kindly step aside; there are others waiting."

I had to laugh; it was retribution with a vengeance.

The Prince slowly turned around; there was lightning in his eyes, though his visage expressed no emotion. But when he saw it was I who stood there, he instinctively stepped back, controlling his angry surprise with an effort that stiffened the tense skin over his cheek-bones and set his jaws tight as a steel trap.

"Monsieur," I said, affably, "let us resume diplomatic relations. I bear no malice."

He evidently expected me to denounce him; he was a trifle pale.

"I mean it," I said; "it is I who am your debtor."

Which was true; except for him I should never have kissed the Grand Duchess. Even now I was wearing her ring on my little finger, under my glove. Bad form, but very comforting.

"I do not particularly desire your company," he said, in a low voice; "but I appear to be at your mercy."

"Then go to the deuce!" I said, hotly. "Do you take me for a blackmailer?" And I walked out of the shop, twirling my stick angrily.

The next moment he had joined me, walking at my side, his hand on my elbow.

"Don't be offended," he said, with candid earnestness; "I have treated you abominably, and I beg your pardon. You are quite right in demanding an interview and I accord it with pleasure—believe me—with greatest pleasure."

"You mean a duel?" I asked, my wrath subsiding. "There's time enough for that; it is I who owe you reparation, Monsieur Von Elbe."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Really?"

"I'm afraid so," I said. "However, let us find some nook for a quiet chat where we can curse each other comfortably."

"A café?" he asked, smiling.

"You had better keep clear of cafés and thoroughfares, too, Monsieur Von Elbe," I said, a little maliciously.

He glanced up, but said nothing until I hailed a cab.

"Where are we going?" he demanded.

"To my apartments, if you will do me the honour."

There was enough irony in my voice, enough danger in the suggestion to touch his amour-propre. As a prudent man, he would have refused; as an officer, he would not.

"With pleasure," he said, carelessly.

I motioned towards the cab, which had stopped close to the curb.

"I beg you to enter first," he said, politely.

"Another question of precedence?"

He winced and bit his lip; I sprang into the cab, he followed, and I bade the cabman drive to the United States Legation.

When Prince Edric heard the direction he turned and looked sharply at me, but I pretended not to notice it.

"Frankly," he said, "why are you going to the American Legation?"

"Have you any objections?" I replied, in apparent surprise.

"Do you think a Prussian officer would be welcome in a Yankee Legation?" he asked, bluntly.

"You know the Dutch proverb," I said, "'One devil does not make a hell.'"

I said it so cheerfully that the anger my words aroused in him was paralysed by my soft tones. There is no severity like gentleness.

"Come," said I, "are there any reasons we should not be friends?"

"I think there are," he said; "you are one of them."

"Nonsense," I laughed; "you and I are sure to like each other immensely. You know the proverb: 'He makes no friends who never made an enemy.'"

"God keep me from my friends, and I'll keep myself from my enemies," he quoted, striving to look cynical.

A few moments later we stopped before the Legation. He eyed the coat-of-arms, but followed me without further questions into the Legation and up-stairs, where I ushered him through a suite of handsome empty rooms into my own apartment.

"You shall try," said I, "a Niagara cocktail with an olive in it."

He nodded doubtfully. A servant brought what I needed, including ice and a thin flask full of almond-shaped olives from Arles.

While I made the cocktails, Prince Edric took a rapid survey. His eyes noted the cavalry sabres crossed over the mantel, the spurs, foils, boxing-gloves. I saw he was trying to make up his mind concerning my profession, and his eyes returned persistently, almost wistfully, to the sabres.

"If it will relieve you," I said, "to know that you are going to drink with an officer of the United States Army, don't trouble yourself further."

He flushed scarlet.

"Why didn't you tell me that in the train?" he asked.

"Because," said I, "my nationality alone should be sufficient to compel respect."

"A civilian and an officer are two different things," he retorted, hotly. "In Berlin the difference is understood."

My impatience was getting the better of me.

"Come," I said, briefly, "I've been more than patient with you, and now I'm going to be frank. He that handles a nettle gently is soonest stung."

I raised my glass and stood up.

"Nevertheless," I continued, "I don't propose to let irritation sour my cocktail. I have the honour!—Herr Von Elbe—"

He jumped up at once and made me a stiff bow, repeating: "Monsieur, to you; the honour is mine—"

The cocktails disappeared; we made each other two more bows, then sat down, prepared for trouble.

"Now," I began, "when you amused yourself by playing highwayman last evening, you had no idea that you were also playing with the buzz-saw of destiny, did you?"

"Are you the buzz-saw of destiny?" he asked.

"I am. You've hurt yourself, too."

"I don't notice it," he said, sarcastically.

"It hasn't begun to hurt yet," I said, finishing the construction of two more cocktails. I handed him his and set mine on the table beside me.

"You deserve," I continued, "what you received. You bully a stranger with a revolver and help yourself to his passport."

"Here's your passport," he said, exasperated; "ask whatever reparation you desire. I'm only too thankful that it's an officer I shall have the honour to encounter."

"What are we going to fight for?" I demanded. "I don't wish to squabble because a man in love has acted rashly."

"A man in love!" he repeated, with narrowing eyes.

"Have you any other excuse for taking my passport as you did?"

"I needed it," he said, sullenly.

"Indeed you did, Prince Edric, and you took it

like a road-agent. Confound it! if you had given me half a hint I'd have stood by you at any inconvenience to myself."

That I had called him by his own name and title staggered him; that I could show him sympathy and generosity under the circumstances hit him harder yet.

"It is easy to see you are an officer and an American," he said. "Your forbearance puts me to confusion."

"Wait," I replied, ominously. "I was arrested and imprisoned because I was taken for you. Your Emperor's two spies, Vossburg and Wiepert, came from the frontier to conduct me to Berlin."

"What can I say!" he cried, deeply distressed. "I will do anything to make amends—indeed I will!"

"Very well," I said, "listen. You know, of course, what the newspapers say about you?"

"Yes," he admitted, setting his teeth and shooting a distrustful glance at me.

"Is it true?"

He turned rigid to the tips of his ears.

"Is that a question?" he asked.

"Yes. I beg your pardon for asking it, but, like your observation concerning my passport, I *must* know."

He glared at me for a moment, then stood up.

"Answer me," I said, coolly. "If it is true that you are in love with a beautiful Luxembourgeoise, then what happened last night is abominable!"

"And what happened last night?" he asked, with tightly compressed lips.

"I told a woman I loved her."

"What has that to do with me?" he returned, in astonishment.

"Why, this—she took me for you!"

He sat down heavily.

I went over the whole episode, not sparing myself in the least. To make such a confession to any man under any other circumstances would have been dastardly; to do so now was the only possible course. It was necessary for the honour and happiness of both Prince Edric and the Duchess Eulalie that the Prince should know what had been done in his name.

Prince Edric listened until I had finished; then he quietly demanded the name of the woman.

"It is the first time I ever disclosed the name of any woman," I said, deeply humiliated; "the lady was the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg."

The utter blankness of his face startled me. For a full minute we faced each other in perfect silence.

"You kissed the Duchess?" he repeated, passing one hand across his eyes as though to conjure up such an amazing vision.

"I did—but she thought it was you," I said, tartly.

He burst into a most ridiculous fit of laughter; I watched him, astonished.

"We won't quarrel about that!" he cried, laughing all the while; "the Duchess is a harmless little feather-head, infatuated with her own husband, who doesn't understand her. She's horribly sensitive and jealous of him and he of her. Why, they've only been married a year! It was a political match, but she fell head over heels in love with the Duke, and dares not hint at it, fearing a repulse. And he's so stupid he can't understand."

"The Duchess didn't seem to bother about it," I said, sarcastically.

"Pooh! When I was here last year I saw she was eating her heart out. She was silly enough to try to revenge the fancied indifference of her husband by attempting to fall in love with me. Don't I know the difference between love and pique?"

"Well," I said, vastly relieved, "what are you going to do?"

"Do? Go to see her and tell her not to be silly. I'll take the responsibility of your indiscretions—I'll shoulder everything. The whole affair is exquisitely humourous, and I don't wonder you tried to pay me in my own coin!"

"And you don't think," I suggested, "that she really will be unhappy?"

It was a curious sensation. I was unwilling to believe that the Duchess, who had confessed so much to me, should not mean it—even though she took me for another man.

"Every word she uttered was meant for her husband—only she didn't know it," he laughed. "I know her."

"Then," said I, "give her back her ring, too." And I drew the curious dull gold circlet from my finger and laid it in Prince Edric's hand.

What followed passed very quickly. For no sooner had he set eyes on the ring than he sprang up in a most extraordinary fury, accusing me of so many things that my head whirled. He denounced me, he swore he'd have satisfaction without delay. I, utterly bewildered, told him he was my guest, and begged him to remember where he was.

"That is not the Duchess's ring!" he cried; "she never wore it!"

"It belonged to the lady I made love to," I said, in a passion; "if you know who she is you can get yourself out of the scrape or not—I don't care a pfennig!"

I thought to myself, "Somehow or other I've been kissing his confounded peasant girl, that's what I've done."

"See here," I continued, "I can't stand this any longer. You and your affairs have bothered me to death ever since I met you. If I've been spooning with any duchess or peasant girl of yours, it serves you right."

Beside himself with fury, he pointed to the sabres on the wall.

"Wait," I said, hotly; "do you think I'm going to spoil my carpets and furniture because you want to carve me up? No, my friend, but I'm going to put on those boxing-gloves and give you a quarter of an hour that you'll remember."

I snatched the gloves from the wall; he looked horrified, but I tossed him a pair for himself and put mine on.

"If I can afford to do it, you can," I said, savagely. "I don't care what your customs are; if you have any human nature left, put those gloves on."

"We are in Europe," he said, breathing hard. "If I were only in America—"

"You're in the United States Legation; politically you are on American soil!"

He took fire at this and drew on the gloves. We were both dying to get at each other; the nervous tension had lasted too long for young blood.

"I take it you know how to box," I observed. I had understood he had been educated in England.

"Yes, I box," he replied, briefly.

As we faced each other, the ridiculous aspect of the situation did not strike us. We were no longer officers—no longer guest and host; we were two boys, possessed with the desire to thrash each other, for each devoutly believed the other needed it.

Mechanically I extended my right glove; he touched it with his, then stepped back.

"Guard!" I said, briskly, and went at him.

CHAPTER X

A MAN'S FREEDOM

A chapter containing hints of a complication calculated to embarrass an empire and a grand duchess

In the course of a dozen seconds I punched the Prince on the nose. In the scuffle that followed I hit him again.

Then we thrashed around the room for a while, pommelling each other in public-school style, upsetting chairs, until he slipped on a rug and sat down abruptly on the sofa.

Oh, but it did us good! We breathed deeply and scowled at each other. The old school-boy spirit flared up—the delight in fighting, the intoxication of thwacking a comrade at close quarters, the ecstasy of being punched in the nose! Blessed privilege of youth!—thrice envied of old age—not until the last arm falls paralysed, and the last clinched fist relaxes—not until the last man has ended his last bout with death, shall the wholesome instinct of battle fail on this battle-scarred planet.

The Prince got up from the sofa; I gave ground, feinted, then hit him on the nose. A moment later he had my head in chancery, and I assisted at a noble display of fireworks. That ended the round; the Prince, being a gentleman, held his nose over the fireplace to spare my carpet; and I brought cold water

and a sponge. Before his nose had ceased from troubling we were laughing together over the whole matter, and chatting on the very best of terms.

He was courteously considerate; he held the wash-basin carefully under his chin and sat down on the sofa while I made two more cocktails.

"What fun!" he kept repeating, in a voice brimming with laughter. "We must do that again, eh? I'll show you something too—a double lead-off at head and body that I meant to use on you but forgot."

"How's your nose?" I inquired, sympathetically, coming up with the cocktails. He set down the wash-basin, wiped his face on a towel, and took the cocktail.

"See here," he said; "I wish we might be friends."

"So do I," I replied, "but, somehow, we squabble frightfully."

"I believe," he said, "we shall always squabble; friendship is a record of mutual misunderstanding. Nobody takes the trouble to differ with an enemy."

He looked sentimentally at the split olive in the bottom of his glass, then swallowed it.

"Who told you my name?" he asked.

I accounted for my knowledge and gave him a brief outline of everything that had occurred.

"Well," he said, philosophically, "I am to-day as friendless and unimportant as any prowling street-cat in Berlin." He held up his glass and looked through it with a reflective smile. "My titles are emptier than that," he said.

"Then let us refill it!" I rejoined, gayly.

"I'd only drain it again; I'd empty it to the dregs."

Now his face grew older with the shadow of care that often lay heavy under his pleasant eyes.

"I wish we might be friends," he repeated; "do you?"

"We are, and will be," I replied, cheerfully.

"Notwithstanding your inborn dislike of Germans?"

I met his quizzical smile seriously.

"I suppose," I said, "that you are self-exiled, and that you have voluntarily forfeited your rank and titles for reasons—"

"What reasons?"

"Everybody knows."

He replied, quite simply: "It is true; I have renounced my world to enter another. It is, after all, my own affair."

I said nothing.

He continued: "I fancy I am a better republican than you are; it takes a prince to understand the blessings of democracy."

There was a tinge of bitterness in his tone; he went on speaking, his head turned towards the window where the sunlight splintered into a million iridescent sparks against the ground glass:

"I am, or I wish to be, merely a private gentleman, whose affairs concern nobody but himself. The press will let me alone in time; I am not essential to its prosperity."

"And the Emperor?" I asked.

"His Majesty will also find me uninteresting," he said, colouring faintly; "I shall not go back."

Presently he looked up at me: "It's rather undignified—a runaway prince—don't you think?"

Before I could reply he added: "Damn the dignity! I have had twenty-five years of it. I've always wished

to do something in the world; I've always had a mania to be let alone. I'm an officer, and I love and respect the army, but I've always longed to give every moment of my life to natural history, and try to do something original in either ornithology or entomology. Why, Hardy, do you know, I've sat in the Brandenbourg palace and chewed my sword-hilt, and envied that Monaco prince who spends his time, when he wishes to, in fishing up coral and sea-weed and polyps for his collection!"

I was touched by the young fellow's simplicity; I listened, however, without comments, because I saw he wanted to talk, and I thought my silence was sufficient sympathy for the moment.

"At twenty-five," he continued, "a man knows his mind. Don't you think so? Well, then, I found that liberty was worth having at cost-price. I might have hesitated a year longer had it not been for his Majesty's desire to have me marry. Think of it, you a freeman—think!—imagine your President choosing a wife for you?"

"Your Emperor is more than the political head of Germany to you," I answered.

"I know. But I cannot stand it! I need to breathe freely, I need to feel limb-free; I cannot endure this political slavery—I cannot!"

He stretched out both arms and took a deep breath.

"I was to have been betrothed to her Majesty of Holland; we had never even seen each other. Her Majesty, being as high-spirited as she is independent, snubbed us, and she will never know how indebted to her I am. Now the project has been resuscitated. So I left Berlin."

"I saw you buying several photographs to-day," I said, smiling.

"I did—her Majesty of Holland's. And you could never imagine why."

I waited, much amused by his eager desire for sympathy and confidence.

"It was because they resemble the face of somebody else whom I hope to marry," he said, naïvely. "Do you mind my talking to you?"

Then, half-wistfully, half-eagerly, he told me of his plans, his hopes, his determination to live like other men, free in mind and body, free to seek the road to happiness, wherever it lay, and pursue it as God had given the right.

"What you read in the papers was misleading," he said. "Last year, while collecting bird's eggs in the Ardennes near Wilverwiltz, I stopped to make an inquiry at the Duke's lodge. There was a young girl there with the head forester — his niece, he said. Whoever she was I know that nowhere in the world have I seen another like her."

He jumped up and walked to the window, pressing his forehead against it, watching the sparrows gather in the trees, for evening was not far off.

I went and stood beside him. Presently he continued, as though speaking to himself: "She is everything a woman should be. I told the Emperor. After what he said I could stay no longer in Prussia."

"Is she here—in Luxembourg?" I asked.

"Yes—no—I don't know. The forester is dead; I don't know where she is. You see, I did not tell her who I was; I said nothing when I went away."

He turned earnestly to me. "I tell you, I knew

the moment I saw her that she was the only woman in the world. And the thought terrified me—me, a man born as free as you!—because I knew that I never could speak of love to her—never! Listen, Hardy. I am a decent fellow, morally; I have never been anything else. And yet, a word of love from me to her would have been misconstrued as insult."

He was excited now; he began to pace the room, hands tightly clasped behind his back.

"Think of it, Hardy! Is it not enough to make a man leave the damnable slavery of caste? Isn't it enough to make a clean-minded man renounce a society which would tolerate anything but marriage? And I tell you that had any other man spoken to me about this young girl as a certain man spoke, I should have killed him! I am no fool. If it had pleased Heaven to make me love a woman of my own caste, I should have clung to her, too, Emperor or no Emperor. But it's settled now; I'm as free and self-respecting as any free man; I'll follow where my inclination leads, and take my chances like a man among men."

"If Wiepert and Vossburg trouble you?" I suggested.

He gave me an ugly look.

"They'll get off with their lives—unless they use force."

Then he took me impulsively by the arm.

"See here, Hardy; did the cloaked figure in the red hood look anything like the Queen of Holland?"

"Not in the least," I said, thankfully.

He was so frankly relieved that I laughed and shook his out-stretched hand heartily.

"It must have been the Duchess," he said; "yet—yet—where on earth did she get this ring?"

I leaned over and examined the dull gold lying in the palm of his hand.

"Where did you see that ring before?" I asked.

"I? Why—I left it there in the forester's lodge. And I think the forester's niece knew that it was for her."

"You left it there?"

"Yes. I even—er—gave it to her."

"And she put it on?"

"Er—I put it on."

"Oh! And then?"

"Then I went away."

"Saying nothing?"

"Nothing."

"And she?"

"She said nothing."

"And the forester?"

"Oh, he'd gone out to the well."

As he spoke I, glancing out of the window, saw old Vossburg leering up at me from the other side of the street.

I touched the Prince on the elbow; he glanced down at Vossburg, started, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll have to face the music; it won't do to complicate things with your government," he said, bitterly.

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "You can't leave now."

"If I don't, your Minister won't thank you for causing a new diplomatic incident between your gov-

ernment and ours. You can't afford to have me tracked to your Legation."

"I don't see why!" I cried. "We don't arrest or extradite for political offences. If Herr Von Elbe desires to seek the protection of the United States, he needn't cross the Atlantic for that."

The Prince started to reply, but a violent ringing at the door-bell cut him short. I looked into the street; it was filled with gendarmes.

CHAPTER XI

THE GRAND DUCHESS

In which chapter the explanation of a mystery deepens the mystery, and sets a young man dreaming of the pleasures of prison

Already a considerable crowd of citizens were gathering in front of the Legation, curious to learn what the gendarmes might be doing there.

I walked leisurely to the open door, where a servant stood parleying with Captain Giroux. When the latter saw me he looked guilty, but old Vossburg's shrill chuckle appeared to reassure him. He returned my sarcastic salutation and started to make a speech, which I cut short.

"Captain Giroux," I interposed, "do you want to involve your country in all sorts of dreadful calamities ?"

"What calamities ?" he began, sulkily. But I continued, without heeding him :

"Just because you've never before had a foreign legation in your amazing city, you expect to be pardoned for ignorance concerning the inviolability of diplomatic sanctuaries, don't you ?"

"I can't help it," he blurted out; "the German Emperor orders that—"

"*Who* orders ?" I asked.

"The Emperor of Germany," he repeated, doubtfully.

"The Emperor of Germany is referred to the United States for information regarding the limit of his consecrated jurisdiction," I said, much amused.

Old Vossburg began to leer and mouth and twitter in his beard; Giroux, uncertain and greatly distressed, surveyed his gendarmes appealingly. They were nice gendarmes too—clothes new, neatly buttoned, and carefully brushed.

"What am I to do?" demanded the agitated Préfet of Police; "everybody orders me to do something to everybody else!"

"Go home to bed with a prayerful resolution to mind your own business every day for a week. Try it," said I, earnestly; "you'll get used to it."

While I was speaking, Vossburg became restless. He squeaked something, and tried to crowd past me into the hallway, where, over my shoulder, I saw Prince Edric standing.

"Get out!" I said to Vossburg, and gave him a nervous push that sent the wretched old man reeling. Prince Edric stepped out on the threshold, but I unceremoniously pulled him back, saying: "Don't leave the Legation! I'll answer for you."

"Arrest that man!" chattered Vossburg, pointing with swollen, purple fingers at Prince Edric.

"By Heaven, Giroux," I said, "if your men cross that mark I'll knock them over, all in a row—like ten-pins!"

Already the crowd had increased until it blocked the street; the gendarmes drew their flimsy gilt-hilted sabres and stood in three neat little lines.

"I'm getting you into more scrapes," said the Prince, quietly; "let me go out. I can take care of myself without involving you any further."

"No, you can't," I replied, now thoroughly aroused. "I invite you to stay here as my guest as long as you please, and I'll be responsible for your comfort."

"It's not wise," he said, smiling; "it is very generous and quixotic and American—but it is not diplomacy."

He was correct. I looked at the gendarmes, at Giroux, and Vossburg. They had not yet crossed the threshold of the Legation, and I saw Vossburg did not mean to give me any diplomatic pretext for complaint. What he was aiming at was to force me, as a United States official, into openly harbouring Prince Edric of Prussia, a political refugee, threatened with arrest by the Emperor's own emissaries.

"Will you accept the position of private secretary to me?" I asked the Prince, hastily.

"Thank you," he laughed; "that is a most delightful way out of it—if you think it won't embarrass you."

I turned to Captain Giroux and ordered him off the steps with a decisive gesture.

"If the Emperor of Germany wishes to investigate the antecedents of my private secretary, Herr Stanerl Von Elbe, let him secure permission from the United States," I said. "In the mean time, don't talk about princes or refugees, of whom I have no official knowledge."

Suddenly old Vossburg, whom I had not seen approaching, sprang at the Prince and attempted to drag him out into the street. I struggled to free him. The next moment a miniature riot began, a ridiculously amiable riot—just such a riot as one might expect in such a city. I shoved away some gendarmes

who had hold of me; they said: "Pardon, monsieur," and let go politely. A Punch-and-Judy combat is much more serious than a Luxembourg revolution. Yet there was one sinister feature about it—old Vossburg, running round and round the ring of swaying figures, squealing with eagerness, his distended, purple, swollen fingers scratching the air. Once he caught the Prince by the arm, but Edric hurled him off with a shudder.

"Good Heavens," I said to him, half laughing, half in rage; "this is too absurd—it mortifies me! Can't somebody take these doll-creatures away?"

Side by side the Prince and I overturned a crowd of clinging gendarmes, who immediately got up again, very dusty, but scarcely even looking reproachful. It was disconcerting; the whole thing seemed all a sham, a knock-about vaudeville show in which I was now performer, now audience. Then the sinister happened—I don't know how, exactly—but the Prince gave a groan and put his hand to his head; and I saw the sly, rheumy eyes of Vossburg over his shoulder—a moment only—before the Prince stumbled up against me, deathly white.

With one arm around him, I saw the hair on his head redden and grow wet where the blow from behind had fallen; and, quite deliberately, I drew my revolver with my disengaged hand and raised it, searching for Vossburg's hoary, bloated face. He had vanished.

When the harmless Luxembourg gendarmerie and populace caught sight of real blood they became frightened; the glimpse of a real revolver, too, shocked them; the gendarmes ran in little circles like luna-

tics, and the mild citizens automatically followed their example, as a colony of water-fleas scatters, frenzied by a pebble tossed among them.

For a moment I held the Prince on his feet; then he grew faint, and slowly sank, a dead weight in my arms. I lowered him gently to the door-step and knelt beside him.

"There's more than an Emperor's malice in this," I said, in a low voice, looking sternly at Giroux.

It was plain enough to me now; Vossburg and Wiepert were in Luxembourg not only to summon Prince Edric to Berlin, but also to create a pretext for German intervention. An assault on the Prince was sufficient to start a German army corps marching. Who would believe it was committed by the Emperor's own agents, and not by citizens?

I sprang to my feet and looked at the frightened people, now crowding in on every side.

"I call you to witness, Captain Giroux," I said, speaking very distinctly, "and I call all honest citizens to witness, that it was a German agent who struck the Prince, and not a Luxembourgeois!"

I paused; somebody in the crowd said: "We witness!" and others joined in: "Yes! yes! We witness!"

"I am not willing to believe that his German Majesty seeks pretexts to march on Luxembourg," I said, loudly; "nor do I imagine for a moment that the great Emperor of a great nation inspires his agents to create pretexts by assaulting German subjects. Therefore, that villanous old creature, Vossburg, is a common assassin, and his capture and punishment the duty of all good policemen and citizens!"

The crowd cheered; somebody shouted: "Down with Germany!"

"A few more similar suggestions," I said, sarcastically, "will doubtless bring Germany down, as you say, but down on *you!*"

The Prince had recovered from his momentary faintness, while Giroux bandaged his head with handkerchiefs, and now he sat up, dizzy and pallid, unrecognisable under his swathed features.

I placed my arms under his, but he said: "Wait a moment; let me sit quietly; I'll be all right in a second."

He thanked Giroux and rested his elbow on one knee, the hand supporting his aching head.

"I'm not going into your Legation, you know," he said, with a faint smile; "I've done you enough harm for one day."

I started to reply, but Giroux, suddenly excited, plucked me by the sleeve spasmodically, and at the same moment I saw the crowd parting and swaying back, leaving a lane in the middle, through which a carriage, preceded by two powdered outriders, gorgeous in green and gold liveries, drove slowly up and stopped before the Legation.

"Her Highness," stammered Giroux, "the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg!"

I saw him raise his hand to his shako in trembling salute; I saw the people, heads bared, lining the curbstone in respectful silence, while the gendarmes, left hands resting on their sheathed sabres, stood in rows, right hands at a stiff angle with their peaked caps.

Prince Edric tried to rise; the blood starting under

the bandages blinded him and he sat down, leaning on my shoulder.

In the carriage were two ladies dressed in white: one very blonde, with a skin like translucent pearl-shell and hair redder than molten copper; the other dark, exquisite, almost a child—the same woman whom I had deliberately kissed through my prison screen—the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg!

When they saw Prince Edric on the steps, they half rose from their seats, and bent forward. The Prince managed to stagger to his feet and bow, leaning on me. The cool inclination of the Duchess seemed to me so utterly heartless that I felt resentment tingling my face.

"Who is he?" she asked, looking unblushingly at me; "and is he badly hurt, monsieur?"

"Madame," I replied, grimly, "a surgeon can inform you of his injury; her Highness the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg must enlighten you concerning his identity."

"I?" exclaimed the other lady—the blond beauty with the splendid red hair.

I turned to her, bewildered.

"I am the Duchess of Luxembourg," she repeated, impatiently; then, as two gendarmes supported the Prince to the carriage steps, she recognised him in spite of his battered condition and stepped out hastily to the sidewalk with a little cry of amazement, motioning the gendarmes to place Prince Edric in her carriage.

I fell back and pulled Giroux with me.

"Which is the Duchess?" I demanded, under my breath; "the one with the red hair?"

"Yes," he said, in some surprise.

"And the other?"

"The other? Why that is the Countess of Wilverwiltz."

"Who?"

"Amyce de Wiltz, Countess of Wilverwiltz! Monsieur, you are pinching my arm."

"What did you tell me she was the Duchess for?"

"I didn't," gurgled the Préfet, in injured surprise.

"You did—last night in prison!"

The moment I said it I saw that I was not the only one who had been duped. He began to open his round yellow eyes and, unless I had instantly dissipated his slowly crystallising suspicions, he would have known what I now knew — that it was the cloaked and hooded little Countess of Wilverwiltz who had imposed on Giroux, and who had been kissed by me in prison.

"Captain Giroux," I whispered, "you have been ridiculed and deceived; I never before set eyes on either the Duchess of Luxembourg or the Countess of Wilverwiltz!"

"But you said—" he began.

"I said that my visitor was young—like the Countess—but she had yellow hair and blue eyes, idiot!—that's what I said!"

Before Giroux could reply a gendarme came to the steps where I stood and, saluting respectfully, said that the Duchess wished to speak to me.

As I went out to the curb, bareheaded, I caught an amused twinkle in Prince Edric's eyes, as he lay back on the cushions between the Duchess and the little Countess.

"'I AM THE DUCHESS OF LUXEMBOURG'"

I bowed and looked innocently at the Countess of Wilverwiltz.

The Duchess smiled brightly and said:

"Lieutenant Hardy, you know how welcome Americans are to us all in Luxembourg. It will give me particular pleasure to receive you when his Excellency the United States Minister returns from The Hague. Thank you for being kind to Prince Edric."

I bowed again and expressed myself suitably, thanking the Duchess for her courteous words concerning my country.

"You are very modest," she said, laughing; "perhaps I meant you yourself would be welcomed whatever your nationality."

I involuntarily glanced at Amyce, Countess of Wilverwiltz, and caught her dark eyes fixed curiously on me.

Then, Heaven knows why, I blushed to the roots of my hair.

"All the same," I thought to myself, as the carriage drove carefully away, "they don't seem much alarmed about poor Edric; they are a cold-blooded duet, and as pretty as the rest of their soulless compatriots."

As I turned back towards the doorway, Giroux humbly tugged at my sleeve.

"Monsieur—pardon!—are you, who stand so high in the favour of our Duchess, contemplating chastisement for me?"

"Perhaps," I said, with satisfaction.

"Monsieur—"

"You'd better arrest that hoary old devil Vossburg before I make terms with you, you ridiculous prod-

uct of an absurd city," I said, and entered the Legation a prey to mixed emotions. What would Osborne say? What would his Excellency say? What would William the Sudden do?

I sat down on the stairs; a porcelain-faced maid peeped at me through the library curtains, but I didn't care. I summed up my performances and mentally pigeon-holed each. First, I had kissed Amyce, Countess of Wilverwiltz; second, I had assaulted William the Sudden's spies; third, I had invited Prince Edric into the United States Legation, and then made his nose bleed; fourth, I had engaged in a riot in the street under the windows of my Legation. And all in twenty-four hours.

About dusk Osborne sauntered in and found me still sitting on the stairs.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he asked.

"Nothing," I sighed. That was a misstatement; I was thinking of Amyce de Wiltz, Countess of Wilverwiltz.

"Why on earth should she impersonate the Duchess?" I said, irritably.

"Who?" asked Osborne.

"Nobody—what did I say?"

"Something about having had too many cocktails," said Osborne, flippantly, and went up-stairs, whistling "Garryowen."

I disdained to retort; a vague reminiscent tenderness stole over me; I closed my eyes and saw the screen in the prison wall and two dark eyes under the scarlet hood, and two lips, redder than the hood.

"In the meantime," I said, aloud, "she is doubtless nursing Prince Edric in the palace. But I don't

see why I should care." I ascended the carpeted stairs thoughtfully.

"Let her nurse him; what do I care?" I repeated; "only I'd like to know why she impersonated the Duchess to tell Prince Edric she adored him."

I was rather tired, almost too tired, to dress for dinner, but Osborne came in looking so civilised that I set about my toilet with a groan.

"Pegged out?" inquired Osborne, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"Slightly," I said, sarcastically. I had not slept a wink in prison the night before; of course he did not know I had been in jail, and I had no desire to tell him.

"Find anything interesting about town?" he asked.

"A few rotten fortifications and a corporal's guard," I replied. "I don't see what the government sent a military attaché here for."

"You will see later; I have despatches from his Excellency by to-night's mail. Oh, you've got a jolly rôle to play yet, my son."

"What are the despatches?" I asked, sponging head and shoulders in icy water.

"Tell you after dinner; hurry up."

I dried my dripping features, fussed with shirts, collars, and white ties, and finally appeared from the dressing-room ready for dinner or anything else as serious.

We dined in rather melancholy state, Osborne and I, served faultlessly by a placid Luxembourgeois.

During dinner I gave Osborne a sketch of the episode leading up to my private riot in the street before the Legation. He was horrified, and he told me so.

"Where on earth did you meet Prince Edric?" he asked.

I evaded the question, not desiring to contribute to Osborne's stock stories a recital of how an American officer was "held up" and robbed of his passport by a German Prince.

"None of your business," I replied; "I know him and that's sufficient. I don't see why the thing need have unpleasant consequences; do you?"

"Of course I do," he said; "a fine diplomat you are, bringing a German into our Legation and resisting his extradition when the Sudden One is sitting up nights to think of a pretext for war!"

I thought, however, I detected a note of banter in his voice; doubtless he was rubbing it in and trying to scare me.

"Pooh," I said, "I've got a hundred witnesses to prove that old Vossburg struck the Prince. As for harbouring him, I didn't, because the Duchess carted him off. You can't disturb my appetite."

"Well," he said, more seriously, "I don't believe there will be a row. But remember one thing: all over Europe our military attachés are regarded with favour where the French, English, and Russian attachés are hated and suspected, because they are simply and solely the most expert spies their governments can find for the posts. Now our attachés don't spy and rummage to any alarming extent; it isn't our policy. Therefore, you are welcome here, and you have every facility for learning chalk from cheese. Be careful not to become unpopular."

I nodded.

"Speaking of cheese," I said, "let's have that and coffee up in the smoking-room."

"No; come to my room," he replied, rising and giving the order for coffee to be served.

We lighted cigars and strolled up-stairs again to his own room, where I immediately lay down on the bed and sipped my coffee Turk fashion, in spite of his objections.

"Osborne," I said, blinking at him through the smoke of my cigar, "who and what is the Grand Duchess?"

"The Duchess? She's a pretty girl who wears nice frocks and makes herself unhappy because her husband neglects her."

"Perhaps he thinks she neglects him," I said, innocently.

Osborne picked up a gun-case from the sofa and unstrapped it.

"I've heard that, too," he said; "it's a pity they can't agree; he's a nice young fellow, educated in England, you know, and a thorough sportsman. He'll invite you to shoot, I fancy; he invites everybody."

"Thanks," I said, dryly; "I'll accept if you can bribe his keeper to invite you."

Osborne had removed his coat, and now sat polishing the barrels of a Greener 12-bore, as pretty a little shot-gun as I ever saw. I watched him without comment; he wrapped the fowling-piece carefully in oiled flannel and slid it into its case again. Then he opened another case and selected another gun.

"Who is the Countess of Wilverwiltz?" I asked, carelessly.

"Oh, our pretty Amyce de Wiltz?"

I resented the "our."

"I suppose she's somebody's," I said; "but I didn't know you were a shareholder. Who is she?"

"She's the gayest and cleverest of the lot," he said, snapping the locks of a 16-bore Scott to test the click. "She's a widow, married old Count Wilverwiltz on his death-bed to please the Duchess. She's the life of a particularly humdrum court; she's a vixen too, if you cross her. And you ought to see her in private theatricals!—by Jove, but she can act!"

"Act?" I repeated. An uncomfortable suspicion began to develop in my mind.

"Act! Rather. She can weep real tears, and she can make you weep 'em too. She is generous, capricious, impulsive, and illogical. You'll probably fall in love with her; we all do."

"Do you indeed?" I said, feeling unpleasant, and not knowing why.

"Yes; then we all get over it and fall in love with the Duchess. I am, now."

"In love with the Duchess?"

"Yes. So's his Excellency. Wait until he comes back from Amsterdam and The Hague, and we'll all be invited to Wilverwiltz for the boar-hunting. Then you'll see games, my son!—you'll see his Excellency dancing after the Duchess and the whole callow outfit after him, while she, poor little girl, worries her life out because she doesn't understand her husband."

After a moment I said:

"Tell me more about the Countess of Wilverwiltz. Do you—er—have you any reason to suppose that she is in love?"

"In love? Not much. Little Amyce looks out

for her precious self too keenly. But she'll flirt—oh, heaven! how she'll flirt!"

"Will she?" I said, savagely.

A quarter of an hour later I sat upon the bed and rearranged Osborne's rumpled pillows.

"What were those despatches that came to-night?" I asked.

"Orders for you to resign from the United States service, and enter the Luxembourg army and reorganise it," grinned Osborne.

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed, incredulously.

He nodded:

"It's a secret, of course; it's an understanding between our government and the Luxembourg government. You are to resign for a while—to spare German susceptibilities—and undertake the reorganisation of the Luxembourg army—just think!—a whole battalion!"

"I won't do it!" I cried, angrily; "it's ridiculous!"

"Oh yes, you will; that's the real reason the government sent you here. Besides, you're to recruit new regiments, because compulsory service is about to be sprung on these unsuspecting Luxembourg cattle. Why, man, it's the chance of your life!"

"When," said I, rather blankly, "am I to begin this thing?"

"Next Monday," replied Osborne, cheerfully; "you get your commission as aide-de-camp to the chief of the Luxembourg general staff. That's only a bluff; the Duke's the staff, and you are simply to tell him how things should be done."

The unexpectedness of the thing left me without

argument. If it was true that the Luxembourg army was to be increased, I had a fancy for the work in hand, and expected to make it interesting.

"The manœuvres will be held near Wilverwiltz," said Osborne, carelessly; "you'll find the air and food good, the shooting excellent, the Duke and the Duchess very kind—but God knows how you'll find the Countess Amyce!"

"I believe you're afraid of her," I said.

"I am," he replied, sincerely.

"Why?"

"Because," he said, "I never knew of a man whom she did not sooner or later make ridiculous. She'll make you ridiculous too."

"We'll see," I said, indignantly, remembering the check I might exercise, if I chose, on the amusement-loving countess.

"Yes—you'll see," yawned Osborne.

I bade him good-night and went to bed.

I was too tired to dream; so it was eight long hours before I again thought of the Countess of Wilverwiltz.

CHAPTER XII

THE GOLD-FISHERS

Wherein two young people cast bread upon the waters and one of them thinks to catch the wind in a net

I AWOKE shortly after sunrise; sparrows twittered a pretty subdued chorus under my window; overhead through the saffron haze a skylark winging, swung, singing unceasingly. Bells sounded, mellow Belgian bells, chiming for new-born hours.

I opened the window and looked out over silent streets down the leafy ravine where the Alzette sparkled through still verdure; and the incense of silver dew, exhaling in the first sunwarmth, sweetened every breath I drew.

Tall white viaducts spanned the ravine like arches chopped in snow; creamy towers and ramparts, veiled in the morning dimness, circled the gray-green landscape, as a trail of melting frost rings meadow-vales at break of day.

Yet the beauty of it all left me unsatisfied; the chameleon colour, the stillness, the frail enchantment, the scented silence disturbed me. This was not the world; lights were too delicate, shadows too indistinct; the earth itself seemed fragile as crusted pearl, inlaid with gemmed grass, enamelled in dainty flower patterns, that troubled me all the more because of their perfume. The world is something

else — it is rankly aromatic; it is wind and cloud and warm sunshine and the green juice of living leaves; it is bedded oaks and doubly bedded rocks; it is the rush and churning of swift waters, it is the roughened surface of gray lakes, it is the ceaseless swing and surge of seas, rocking forever from pole to pole.

But this land of dyes and tinted skies and silence, this exquisitely formal landscape, dainty, conventional, cunningly wrought with finer reproductions from nature's robust originals, disconcerted me. I felt out of touch with real things; I missed the strong odour of fresh earth and tree-roots and healthy unfiltered streams and rotting forest mould.

"I suppose somebody shampoos the squirrels and curry-combs the rabbits out there in the forests," I thought; "anyway somebody has dusted off the sky and varnished all the buttercups. Oh, this world of Dresden-china!"

All day long Osborne sat in his den, busy with despatches, deciphering code messages from Washington and The Hague, copying memoranda, using a typewriter at times until I objected to the eternal click-click-ting-a-ling-scra-ape! click! click!

"Haven't you anything to do?" asked Osborne, irritably. "I wish you wouldn't keep looking at the back of my head."

"I've something better to do than to listen to your grunts and groans—if anybody should ask you," I replied. "I'm going out. Come on."

Osborne returned to his typewriter.

"Come on," I repeated; "let's do something!"

"If you want something to do," he said, "go and

inquire how Prince Edric is. You may see the Countess, you know," he added, maliciously.

Now that is exactly what I had been contemplating, but for the first time in my life I experienced a sensation that I had never before suspected myself capable of—timidity.

"Do you suppose it would be all right?" I asked.

"What? Oh, don't get an idea that there's any formality about this court! It's a free and easy aristocracy, and not as impressive as it might be. You'd never know the Duke was a duke nor the Duchess a duchess if the soldiers didn't present arms every now and again."

"Then you think I might present myself too?"

"Why not? In a week you'll be the Duke's aide-de-camp. I tell you they are anything but formal. As for Edric, he's no longer a German prince."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Edric," I said, laughing, "though we once had a difference concerning a question of precedence."

As I went away down the stairs, Osborne called after me: "I forgot to say that the Duke's tailor is coming to measure you for six uniforms at five o'clock!"

Six uniforms for one aide-de-camp! It was almost enough to clothe the whole army. The cultivated distaste of a United States officer for anything but disreputable uniforms was as strong in me as in the dowdiest old colonel west of the Mississippi. I, who was so particular when in mufti, felt it a humiliation, almost a degradation, to be forced into a decent, tasteful, artistic, and reasonable military dress. It is one of our little Anglo-Saxon hypocrisies to cry

"Vanity of Vanity!" which is in itself but a sorry sort of vanity.

"Fuss and feathers, gold-lace and braid," I repeated, just as I had heard my uncultivated countrymen repeat: "I won't be a guy to please the Duke or his Excellency or anybody else." And I went out into the street, conscious that my civilian wardrobe did me justice!

Before I entered the Boulevard des Curés where, on the corner of the Rue du Gouvernment, the Hôtel de la Maison Royale stands, I felt little trepidation at the prospect of meeting the Countess of Wilverwiltz. Yet, when I came in sight of the Palace, I experienced a distinct desire to stop. And I did.

"Suppose," said I to myself, "that Prince Edric has gently chided the Duchess for coming to the prison—the Duchess who is absolutely innocent! What a row!"

An old apple-woman wheeled her push-cart up beside me and sold me six apples, which I paid for and returned to her with a bow. I was quite willing to buy anything to gain time; she missed her fortune that day, poor soul.

"Suppose," thought I to myself, "that the Countess hears that it was I and not Edric who made love to her in prison!"

I took a stroll down the Place d'Armes to gain more time.

"Dear me," I thought, "if time is money and I gain time at such a rapid rate I'll have a surplus in the treasury by evening."

A girl sold me a bunch of corn-flowers and laughed prettily when I overpaid her. I told her to imitate

the saints and shame the devil, and walked into the Rue de Génie to gain more time.

"Nevertheless," thought I, as a child sold me a dozen slate-pencils, "I'm none the richer for my avarice;" and I gave the slate-pencils back to the child and added all my loose coppers to the restitution.

"Little boy," said I, "never do work to-day that you can put off till to-morrow; I never do. And it is singular," I added, "how the work accumulates."

By that time I was in front of the palace again, where two sentinels paraded, bayonets fixed, chin-straps down.

I regarded my future troops with disapproval; then, remembering all the surplus time I had hoarded up, decided to spend a little of it in seeking Prince Edric.

"Not that I care tuppence whether or not the Countess knows I kissed her," thought I; "but it is disconcerting to be snubbed by somebody you know well enough to make love to, and not to bow to."

"Fancy," I continued to myself, "people asking me: 'Do you know the Countess?' and my confessing that we were merely on kissing terms."

Thoughtfully, head chastely bent, hands clasped behind my back, I entered the Palace court; and, as I strolled, I pondered on that strange encounter in the prison.

There were soldiers about, some sitting on stone benches outside the guard-house, sunlight shining full on their scarlet and blue uniforms, some patrolling the inner court-yards, bayonets fixed. A non-commissioned officer wandered into view, and I went to meet him. We saluted each other profoundly.

"I came," said I, "to visit Prince Edric, of Prus-

sia. Will there be any difficulty about obtaining admission ?"

"None that I know of," he said.

"Then I may see him ?"

"Why not, monsieur ?"

"I suppose it would not be possible to see the Duchess ?"

"I don't know why," he replied, placidly.

"Or the — the Countess of Wilverwiltz ?"

"Monsieur, you may go where it pleases you, and you may see whom you please in Luxembourg," he said, indifferently.

As I climbed the broad Palace steps, I thought to myself that when things were reorganized in Luxembourg I'd put an end to informality. The despotism of aristocracy is sometimes envied by those whose Republican heritage has become tainted with license.

There were flunkies roaming about in every direction; one of these embroidered adjuncts directed me to cross a grassy inner court to the western wing of the Palace, where doubtless the guards would know what was next to be done.

The inner court, bordered by gray arcades, echoed with the music of falling water where two broad fountains splashed in the shadow. It echoed with something pleasanter, too — the melody of laughter and young voices chattering.

I saw them at once—the Duchess, the Countess of Wilverwiltz, and another—a very young girl with an orange sunshade. They stood close to the stone edge of the southern fountain-pool, greatly interested in the efforts of the Countess, who was attempting to fish for a goldfish with a bent pin and a thread. She

had hold of one fat fish, brilliant as a live coal, who floundered and spattered among the lotus blossoms, and wound the thread around stem and root so tightly that the Countess, fairly outgeneralled, could do nothing but hold her end of the thread while the Duchess poked the lotus buds with her parasol to disentangle things.

The Countess saw me first, but pretended not to; it was the Duchess who apparently discovered me as I passed the southern arcades.

She did not appear to be surprised; she laughed prettily, and made a despairing gesture toward the fountain:

"Please, Lieutenant Hardy, aid us to reason with this disloyal fish! We wish to place him in the other fountain and he won't go."

As I crossed the grass and joined them, the Countess glanced up at me with the faintest flush of recognition; but her voice and manner were cool to indifference when I was presented. The very young girl with the orange sunshade was Mademoiselle Bettina d'Yssel, a distant cousin, who still bore traces of convent pallor on her face, and whose very skirts were fragrant with the scent of convent gardens.

"Prince Edric is asleep and quite comfortable," said the Duchess, "but it's time he awaked, and you may go and rouse him as soon as you disentangle our fishing-line."

"And catch that fish," added the Countess Amyce.

I took the line from her gloved hand and stepped onto the curbed stone rim of the pool.

"Do be careful, monsieur," said the Countess, in a

voice that satisfied me she would give every ring off her pretty fingers to see me tumble in.

I had to break off a lotus flower to get the line; after that it was not difficult, and in a few moments I drew the fat red fish up to the fountain edge, lifted it, carried it flapping across the grass, and plumped it into the other fountain, none the worse for the journey.

"Now," said the Duchess, sedately, "we can go for our drive with a sense of duty done—can't we, Amyce?"

"I shall not go," said the Countess Amyce; "I shall catch more fish—unless Lieutenant Hardy has ruined my hook and line."

"I don't see," said the Duchess, "why you would rather fish than drive to the Semois. Still, if you wish—"

"I like to catch things," said the Countess, examining the bent pin and carefully baiting it with a crumb of bread.

The Duchess watched the process, pleasantly indifferent; I offered to bait the pin securely and was told that I didn't know how.

"If you are amiable," said the Duchess, smiling at me, "you will come to us at Wilverwiltz next Monday. Do you care for boar-hunting? There are wolf-drives too, next month. But of course you will come; my husband expects—"

She hesitated, with a significant glance at the others.

"I am to be fitted for my uniforms at five to-day," I said. So she understood that I had accepted the commission as aide-de-camp.

"I understand what you mean, too," said the Countess without looking up; "it isn't a diplomatic secret, I hope."

"I do so wish to hear diplomatic secrets," cried Mademoiselle Bettina, with an enfranchised schoolgirl's appetite for actualities.

"Come then, I'll tell you hundreds," laughed the Duchess, encircling the young girl's waist with her left arm, and nodding brightly to me as she turned away.

"Do you wish me to come?" asked the Countess, dropping her bent pin into the water.

"I don't know," said the Duchess, colouring a little; "I thought—in case you were not coming—Bettina and I would take a dog-cart and drive to the chase."

"And bring the Duke back with you?" asked the Countess, carelessly.

"If he has finished shooting," said the Duchess. Two rose spots glowed in her cheeks; she spoke indifferently; yet for a moment I saw in her blue eyes the shadow of a sorrow too hopeless for such young eyes.

So she went away over the grass, her arm clasping the sashed waist of the enthusiastic convent maid; and they entered the north colonnade where footmen and flunkies stood in a stiff row, awaiting the behest of her Highness.

"Prince Edric's apartments are in the east wing," observed the Countess Amyce, without looking up.

The dismissal was certainly abrupt; I said what I should have said, a trifle stiffly perhaps, and turned towards the east wing.

"I don't believe he's awake," said the Countess, apparently to herself.

I hesitated.

"So you'll have to awaken him," she observed.

I moved on.

"Unless—" she continued.

I stopped.

"He's already awake," she added, maliciously.

I grew unpleasantly warm to the ears, perfectly conscious that I had been made ridiculous.

"Sometimes those who are awake need rousing most," I said, quietly.

She looked up with an innocent air of wonder.

"How quaint. It's an Eastern proverb, isn't it, Lieutenant Hardy?" she asked, moving her line gently to and fro in the limpid water.

I fairly ground my teeth.

"Suppose," she said, after a moment's thought, "that I should ask you a favour; what would you think?"

"May I hope for such fortune?" I replied, quickly, forgetting my resentment.

Her dark eyes rested on me; then she lowered them, saying:

"Fortune is a slave to the wise and a master to the stupid."

"But a man once planted pebbles and raised roses," I said, laughing.

She nodded gravely: "And pricked his fingers with the thorns. I have heard about that man."

She lifted her hook from the water; the bread crumb had been nibbled off. She permitted me to rebait the pin; I moulded the crumb on firmly and lowered it again into the water, offering her the string.

"You may fish," she said; "you are so wise and full of proverbs about fortune. Has fortune been so kind that you celebrate her in proverbs?"

"Fortune is like one's sweetheart; if you neglect her to-day, do not expect her to be kind to-morrow."

"What constancy!" she said, apparently lost in admiration. "I could never be fortunate."

At that moment I caught a goldfish, lifted it, squirming, and dropped it into the other fountain.

"Let me—now!" she said, capriciously, taking hook and line and holding out the pin to be redecorated. My hand brushed the tips of her gloved fingers.

We stood there quite silently, intent on her still line, watching the plump, lazy goldfish nibble discreetly, and then wiggle away among the lotus stems.

"The favour I ask," she said, abruptly, "is not a personal one."

"It is to me—because you ask it," I said.

Perhaps this displeased her; I don't know. At all events she remained silent so long that I began to feel uncomfortable. And I have no doubt she knew it.

Once or twice we nearly caught a goldfish, but both times the bread came off and I drew up the pin and repaired damages.

"I suppose," she said, at last, "that you have heard rumours of a slight estrangement between the Duke and the Duchess of Luxembourg. I speak of this because you are soon to be his Highness's confidant and aide-de-camp."

"Yes," I said, simply; "I have heard of it."

"From whom?"

"I don't remember."

She smiled, with a little gesture of approval.

"That is delightful! A man who doesn't remember has a career before him!"

"Discretion is the alphabet of diplomacy," I said, much pleased with myself. Why on earth is it a man always prides himself on the quality he does not possess!

"Yes, discretion is the first law of success," said the Countess, gravely. "It was discreet of you, for example, to say that you had heard of trouble between the Duke and the Duchess."

I turned red and set my teeth. This was simply intolerable; I had been flouted to my face with a ridicule impossible to resent openly.

"It is this nice balance between justifiable discretion and useless secretiveness that inspires a woman's confidence," she continued, thoughtfully.

My face was burning; nevertheless I looked at her steadily and said:

"If I am unsuspicious of others, it is perhaps because I am not inquisitive. I see no reason to conceal from you that I have heard it said the Duke and the Duchess misunderstand each other."

"That is exactly it," she said, quickly; "they do misunderstand each other. And I am going to ask you to watch every chance to influence the Duke. You can do it; I knew it as soon as I saw you. You are the kind of man he likes—men who are human and unspoiled—men who can spend all day prowling over malarial marshes after snipe—men whose household gods are bit and spur—men who have likes and dislikes, and whose hearts are open pages for all who choose to read."

"In other words, a tactless, well-meaning idiot!" I

said, stung to the quick. "Doubtless I will suit his Highness to a T."

"You are very sensitive," she said, flushing. "You don't understand the compliment I pay you. Women find men who are adepts in that woman's weapon, diplomacy, a trifle unsexed and unworthy."

It was wonderful how her words could alternately sting and soothe. Again my resentment vanished, and I promised her that whatever I could do, if an occasion offered, I would do to influence the Duke as she desired.

"He is so young—about your age"—she said; "he is obstinate and tactless and horribly sensitive, although, like most sensitive men, he has hidden a finer nature under a selfish materialism. He seeks his pleasure in his hounds and wolf-drives, when, if he dared acknowledge it to himself, he'd give the head off his shoulders to be with his wife."

The delicate colour in her cheeks deepened; earnestness and animation filled her eyes, and her voice, too, with a sweetness irresistible.

"I say this to you," she said, "because you are the man to say it to. I knew it when I saw you yesterday. I am so glad you are to be his aide-de-camp. If you reform the Duke as well as I know you can reform the army, you may ask for what you will."

"From you?" I said, smiling.

"Oh, I am only Countess of Wilverwiltz," she replied, carelessly; "the Duke confers honours."

"There are honours," said I, lightly, "worth striving for—I have already received two, unmerited."

"And what may those honours be?" she asked, her eyes very bright.

"The honour of your confidence—the honour of receiving your commands," I said, looking into her eyes.

She stood silent with that indefinite smile hovering near her parted lips.

"I am convinced you mean what you say," she said; "it was gallantly spoken for a courtier—it is the more to be prized from a soldier."

Then, with a return to the faintest mockery:

"Sincerity is so strange a visitor—one scarcely knows how to value it in these brilliant days of truth's decadence."

"I have noticed no decadence where I come from," said I.

"There!" she exclaimed, laughing, "I knew you were a celestial visitor—an angel of grace; and I'm quite prepared to believe that heaven is all you say it is! Be an archangel of common-sense to the Duke, make him new regiments, buy him new cannon, and teach him that the Duchess is a mistress worth the adoration of a lover—a wife worth the confidence of a husband."

"And keep Prince Edric away," I observed, carelessly.

Taken by surprise she betrayed herself, and the next moment was furious for having done so. But she was not foolish enough to attempt evasion, although even as she spoke I saw that the wonder had not died out in her eyes—the utter amazement that I should suspect anything concerning the Prince.

"Yes, and keep Prince Edric away," she said, slowly; "I don't understand how you know what you appear to know, but it is evident you are well informed."

"Yes," I said, "I am well informed."

I placed one foot on the stone curb of the fountain and, resting my elbow on my knee, looked down at the goldfish. She also bent over the water; our reflected eyes met in the pool; then she looked away.

"What do you know?" she asked, presently.

"This," I answered: "that the Prince is in love—but not with the Duchess. If she for a moment supposes herself in love with him—and it is dangerous for a young wife to suffer a husband's neglect too long—she will learn very quickly that Prince Edric never had the faintest spark of that sort of love for her. This is brutal to say, but it is the truth."

"Yet he came here—for her sake," said the Countess, quietly.

"No. He came for another's sake."

"The old story of the peasant girl?" she said, scornfully.

"Yes, the old story of the peasant girl—the old, old story—Love."

The Countess laughed a little laugh that said: "Oh you are so young—so distressingly naïve."

"No," said I, "it is you who are deceived this time. I affirm it on my honour as a soldier—I affirm it on my honour as the man who has been doubly honoured with your confidence and commands. The Prince has never dreamed of such a thing."

"And suppose I should affirm that he had declared his love for the Duchess," said she; and again the carmine stained her cheeks and her eyes grew brighter.

"Listen," I said, speaking distinctly yet almost inaudibly: "You, Madame la Comtesse, are generous, impulsive, fearless, and—a little fond of the excitement of mischief—"

"What!" she cried.

"I beg you to listen—I beg you not be offended. This is too important, and I must say what I have to say."

"With all the tact natural to you," she replied. "I beg your pardon."

"Tact or no tact," I said, "it is better for me to go on. And I wish merely to put a hypothetical question: Suppose that your dearest desire was to reconcile a young wife and her husband; suppose that young wife, stung by neglect, tortured with misunderstanding, tried to find relief in making herself believe she could become interested in another man. Suppose that other man appeared in the vicinity and was thrown into prison—"

"Prison!" echoed the Countess, nervously.

"Suppose the young wife went to him in prison—"

"She did not!" cried the Countess, crimson and pale by turns.

"Went to him," I continued, serenely, "and confessed she loved him and gave him a ring—"

"This is ignoble!" said the Countess, with unconcealed passion and wrath flashing from her dark eyes. "If Prince Edric told you this—"

"He did not!"

"Who did?"

"Listen," I said, almost impatiently: "I am presenting an hypothesis. But there is a better hypothesis than that and it's this: Suppose the young wife's friend—you, for example—knowing that the man was in prison, should take it upon yourself to go and see him?"

The Countess, pale and breathless, stood motionless, staring at me, her hand clinched and pressed tightly to her hip.

"Suppose," I went on, "that—you, for example—but *only* for example—believed that the Prince might return after his release and that the young wife might again be in danger. And suppose you, believing this, decided to assume the character of the young wife and impose on jailer and prisoner. And suppose you, for the sake of the young wife, permitted the prisoner to believe you loved him and then appealed to him as a man of honour never to see you again."

"Yes," said the Countess, in a clear, low voice, "I did this thing."

"I know you did," I said, "and that is not all. Because you are generous and loyal you went there; because you are young and daring you enjoyed it; because you love mischief and are a consummate actress you produced a scene that was a masterpiece. By your cleverness you apparently made it impossible for an honourable Prince to return to the Duchess; by your daring and exquisite appreciation of mischief you punished him for his apparent presumption. You did missionary work and did it so that it was palatable to yourself."

Trembling with anger, the Countess faced me.

"If Prince Edric thought I was the Duchess—and told you, he is a scoundrel! If Prince Edric knew me through my disguise and paid me in my own coin, he is clever. But if he told you what you know, he is a dishonourable man!"

I said: "Will you accept my word of honour?"

She waited a moment, then nodded.

"Then I say to you that Prince Edric did not tell me."

"Who told you?" she asked, steadily. "Giroux?"

"Giroux thought you were the Duchess; you know he did. Not only was he certain that you were the Duchess, but he believed absolutely that his prisoner was Prince Edric."

"What do you mean?" whispered the Countess, eyes round with horror.

"I mean that the prisoner was not Prince Edric; I mean that Prince Edric has no idea that you or the Duchess ever entered that prison."

I thought for a moment she would faint; her pallor was frightful, but she steadied herself and swallowed desperately.

"So," I said, "you see that Prince Edric does not love the Duchess, nor does he dream that she thinks she cares for him. There is nothing to fear from him; he is absorbed in his own affairs. As for me, I will loyally second your efforts to bring husband and wife together; and if God wills it, it shall be done."

I bowed very carefully and stepped back a pace or two. The utter misery in her lovely face sent a thrill of remorse through me; I would have given my right hand if I had not kissed her in prison—I'd have given my head before I would have lost the memory of that kiss—or the chance to punish her.

"Who was—was the—the prisoner?" she stammered. "He told you this; he is a scoundrel!"

"I'm afraid he is," I said, remorsefully; "but I promise you that he will never tell another soul. And you know I keep my word."

For a full minute she leaned against the fountain-

rim, looking at me. Then a terrible light flashed up in her eyes; she faced me swiftly, so close that I breathed the subtle perfume of her hair.

"It was you—in the prison"—she panted—"you coward!"

At the word I simply turned cold to the tips of my fingers. When I could speak I said, slowly:

"That is not the word to use, Madame la Comtesse." I added, my anger scarcely under control: "You may thank yourself for what occurred!"

"For what occurred?" she said, in a white-heat; "you shall pay dearly, monsieur."

"I have paid dearly already," I said, soberly; for the hate in her eyes hurt me as nothing had ever hurt. "My bitter punishment is your anger; your punishment is far lighter—it is self-reproach—and I do not think you will be too hard on the Countess of Wilverwiltz."

Troubled, irresolute, I began to pace the greensward; she stood as though changed to stone, but her beautiful angry eyes followed me as I turned, retraced my steps, and turned again.

At last I resolutely came back to the fountain and told her as simply as I could how sorry I was, how I regretted the folly that drove me to mischief, how hopeless I felt that she might ever come to forgive me.

And even as I spoke I could not help but remember the touch of my lips on her hair; and perhaps she divined that I could not regret all, for the red blood mantled her face and neck, and there was no mercy in her eyes. But her voice was like velvet when she said:

"The world, monsieur, is very small. Pray you

keep as far away from me as God's measurements permit."

"Nevertheless," I thought, angrily, as I walked away toward the eastern colonnade, "I shall neither leave Luxembourg nor renounce the beginning of my career for you!"

CHAPTER XIII

HIS EXCELLENCY RETURNS

In which two young men insist that there is no more balm in Gilead; and a woman declares war

"THERE is no balm in Gilead!"

We pass the first part of life in desiring the second; the second in regretting the first; the third in longing for immortality: "God knows what we'll want after that!" said I to myself. "There is no such thing as being satisfied."

It was clear that I was not satisfied.

"Do I care whether a silly young girl finds me detestable or delectable?" said I to myself.

Nobody replied. It is true I was alone.

"Is there such a thing as satisfaction in existence?" I asked myself, irritably. "Even celestial conditions are mirages; 'Heaven, the *vision* of fulfilled desire'—"

By this time I was climbing the curved marble stairway in that section of the Hôtel de la Maison Royale that lay directly over the east colonnade. At the head of the stairs stalked a filigreed flunky who proved docile enough to announce me; and presently another servant, who apparently served the Prince as valet, ushered me into an exceedingly rococo morning-room, full of sunshine and the odour of Flemish tobacco. Prince Edric, swathed in a kimona, his head tied up in

bandages, sat by the bay-window rocking vigorously in an American rocking-chair.

"Hello!" he cried, "have you a decent cigar?"

"Hello!" I said, much amused; "I've a case full."

"This is delightful!" he rattled on in that same eager, boyish voice. "I'm half crazy with ennui and rocking-chairs—one of your insidious Yankee inventions. You sit in it and it rocks—then you rock it yourself—then you get tired of it, but it has some damnable infatuation for you that keeps you rocking until you're ready to smash it. But you don't; you keep on rocking!"

I was as glad to see him as he was to see me; I felt that warmth of comradeship, that subtle sympathy that must be mutual to exist at all. And straightway we began chatting like old friends long parted.

"That whack on my head hurt like the devil last night," he observed; "but to-day it's healing; want to see it?"

I examined it, re-dressed the wound, and prepared him a long glass of Rhine-wine and Schwepps, for he still felt a trifle feverish. Incidentally, I made a similar cooling draught for myself.

"Can't stand this hospital atmosphere," he said, drinking deeply and touching his mustache with his handkerchief; "I'm going out to-morrow—I've got to go—"

"No, you haven't," I said; "I'll do whatever is necessary."

"You can't," he rejoined, faintly amused—"not in this case."

His face had changed; again that careworn shadow fell deeply under his handsome eyes.

"What a worry life is," he said, petulantly; "boyhood is the happiest time."

"It's a pity we have to become men before we know it," I added.

"'Le vieillard est un homme qui a diné et qui regarde les autres manger,'" he quoted, gloomily. "I'm getting on in years."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Don't tell unless it will do you good."

"Oh, I want to tell," he replied, laughing, yet a little vexed at his unconcealed necessity for a confidant. "I'm awfully tired of dining on my own misery. Do you mind? It's a woman, of course."

Perhaps I should have discouraged confidence under other conditions. A healthy minded man seldom sympathises intelligently with a love-sick comrade. But the episode by the fountain had worked in me a fresh-water "change into something rich and strange" —what, I no more suspected than Bottom suspected his ass's ears. I merely knew I was miserable myself, and, desiring company, I said:

"Go ahead."

He tied the tassels on his bath-robe tighter, rocked solemnly, stopped, rocked again, sighed, and continued rocking as he spoke.

"It's this: there's no use in blinding myself any longer; I'm hopelessly in love with a young girl whom I never saw but once in my life, and unless I marry her I don't want to live!"

"The forester's niece?" I asked.

"Yes—and no. She was not the forester's niece; that's the puzzling part of it, for the Duchess told me this morning that the late head forester had no niece.

Yet he certainly told me at the time that she was a niece or something of his or somebody's."

"Can't you find her?" I asked, curiously.

"No, I can't. How am I going to when I don't know her name? At least, I believe that her first name is Helma; but that doesn't count because it was merely a baby name, she said."

"Oh, she said so?"

"Yes. She wouldn't tell me any more. She laughed at me in the prettiest, shyest way—only I felt at times that she was enjoying something or other at my expense. I don't believe she spoke a dozen words to me, all told."

"Did you tell her or the head forester who you were?" I asked, much interested.

"No; I called myself Von Elbe—it's a family name. Then I went away, after giving her the ring."

"But next day—didn't you go back?"

"No, confound it! I left Luxembourg an hour later. You know there was some talk of my betrothal to the Queen of Holland? She came to Wilverwiltz with the Queen Regent that very morning—poor little innocent, ignorant that our gracious Emperor had decided to mate us, as you and I mate pigeons! So when I learned that the little Queen had arrived to be exhibited with me I took pity on her first, and I took pity on myself next, and then I took 'the key of the fields.'"

"You ran away?" I exclaimed, delightedly.

"I ran away—from Wilverwiltz the very day that her petite Majesty arrived. I never saw her; she never saw me. But when she learned the Emperor's plans she snubbed us all around—and here's to her! Prosit!"

We emptied our glasses to the youthful Queen of Holland.

Edric began to rock again, staring absently at the sunny window-curtains.

"You see," he said, "I can't waste time nursing a damaged noddle; I must get out, I must try to find her. Hardy, I simply can't be happy without her." He pointed at the wall where he had carefully nailed a group of a dozen photographs—the photographs I had seen him buy—all pictures of the lovely little Queen of Holland.

"They remind me of her," he said, looking somewhat silly, as men always do under such circumstances. "But she was much more beautiful," he added.

"Love is like a climbing rose-vine; the more you check it, the faster it grows," I said, trying not to speak sentimentally.

Edric looked up.

"Now don't tell me *you* are in love!" he cried —"you, the prudent, the cool, the practical—"

"In love!" I retorted, startled. "Pooh!"

Edric regarded me with a mocking smile; then he hummed aloud a couplet that certainly had no meaning for me:

"Ne cherchons point un vain détour
Pour excuser notre faiblesse;
Les premiers soupirs de l'amour
Sont les derniers de la sagesse!"

An hour later I left him, promising to call again next day; and, as I descended the marble stairway and traversed the deserted court, I glanced wistfully at the two splashing fountains. The silence was ac-

centuated by the mellow echoes of falling water; nothing of life remained there save two dusty little sparrows, demurely drinking, side by side, at the fountain-rim.

"They are on better terms than the Countess and I," said I to myself, with needless bitterness; for what did I care?

When I reached the Legation and went up-stairs to my apartments I found the Duke's tailor in the anteroom. It depressed me.

The process of being measured for anything is maddening. Add to this the presence of a servile tailor, who skipped when spoken to and lisped in Teutonic French, and the result is enough to upset Patience—and her pedestal into the bargain.

At last he skipped roguishly away, leaving me in a mood for crime.

"Oh, how beautiful you will be!" said Osborne, looking in at the door. "My! my! all gold and feathers and precious stones and pearls of wisdom! A perfect aide-de-camp!"

"Come, Victor," I said, wearily, "let me alone or there'll be a vacancy in the diplomatic service."

He noticed I was out of humour.

"See the Countess?" he inquired, sympathetically.

"None of your business," I answered, more in anger than in sorrow.

"I told you so," he said; "I told you what she did to nice young men. Now, next week you'll prudently fall in love with the Duchess. We all do."

"Did I say that I was in love with the Countess?" I asked, indignantly.

"No—you didn't sa-y so," replied Osborne, with an irritating drawl.

I threw myself on the bed and pretended to yawn.

"Mad ?" inquired Osborne, in a mincing voice that roused me to fury.

He patiently dodged both pillows, ducked at a hair-brush, and, placing his eyes at the door-crack, observed me fondly.

"We're all like that at first," he said. "Symptoms: hot head, sick feeling in cardiac muscles, peevishness, and a desire for assassination."

I had to laugh.

"Hysteria, too," he murmured; "crisis rapidly approaching. Remedy: a teaspoonful of philosophy in a pint of the milk of human kindness."

"Don't, Victor," I said; "I'm not in the humour for it."

He came in and sat down on the edge of the bed beside me.

"Seriously," he said, "don't let that little Countess double you up, Gilbert. She's absolutely cold and heartless as far as that sort of thing goes. She's played the mischief with everybody in Luxembourg."

"You don't fancy I'm in love with the Countess of Wilverwiltz, do you ?" I asked, weakly.

"I don't know; are you ?" he demanded.

I said "Pooh !"—a favourite expression of mine when I wished to compromise with truth. A moment later, realising what "pooh" meant in my vocabulary, I started to add something else. But all I could think of was "bosh."

"Am I in love ?" I asked myself, incredulously. In-

stead of a strong, vigorous mental denial, my vacillating will conjured up a single word, "Pooh!"

"Anyway," I said, looking up at Osborne, "she hates me."

"Then you are in love?" he reiterated, unrelentingly.

"Yes, damn it, I am!" I burst out.

The sudden mental illumination was perhaps so bright that it gave a lurid tinge to my language. No —there was no longer any doubt about it; I had caught fire from her eyes, and the smouldering cinder flared up with my wrath at Osborne's chaffing.

As for Osborne, once he saw how seriously I took it he became perfectly decent and unobtrusive. He merely wished me success, and said it in a way that left a warm spot in my heart for him for all time.

I remember he said, standing by the bed:

"It is the things one says to a woman that leave her indifferent; it is the things one leaves unsaid that make her understand that she is loved. Go it, Saint George!"

After he had gone away it occurred to me that his dubbing me Saint George left an inference that was scarcely flattering to the Countess.

"It will be a tougher battle than fighting dragons," I said to myself.

Late that night his Excellency unexpectedly returned from The Hague. Osborne and I were asleep, but the racket the porters made with his Excellency's luggage in the marble-tiled hallway awoke us both.

"It's the old man," said Osborne, disrespectfully, coming into my room in pajamas and slippers; "he'll want to see us, so you might as well get up."

"And dress?" I asked, much annoyed.

We found his Excellency in the dining-room applying himself earnestly to cold fowl and Rhine wine. He was, to my horror, enveloped in a badly creased duster; a travelling-cap lay on the table among the wineglasses; a Baedeker's *Guide to Luxembourg* rested beside it.

As I first set eyes upon his Excellency I understood at once that he was not a man—he was an institution—the embodiment of statesmanship as understood in village stores; the symbol of patriotism as worshipped in a rural metropolis; the apostle of culture as she is taught.

Osborne said that when his white chop whiskers were neatly brushed forward he appeared very impressive; at present he resembled a hungry buck-rabbit which had been rained on.

He was most civil to me—a trifle ponderous, perhaps, but kind. He said he was sorry I was not to remain a member of his official family—he said it with his mouth full of chicken.

Being above all conscientious, he spoke French, when he could, because it was the language of diplomacy and he scorned to shirk it.

"I've been mostly all over 'le continong' since I saw you," he explained to Osborne; "Paree, Munich, Antwerp, Rome—fixing things up all round." Turning on me, he looked at me through the sides of the goblet from which he was drinking, dried his featureless mouth, cleared his throat, and said:

"Ever been to Rome?"

I said I had.

"See that Wolf with Romeo and Juliette deriving nourishment? Ain't it grand?"

"Yes," I said, gravely, not daring to look at Osborne.

"You remember the inscription, sir?" said Osborne, wickedly—"*Homo homini lupus*—what's born of a wolf will nurse wolves."

His Excellency nodded thoughtfully, as though briefly reviewing his college days. It was a shame to chaff him.

Yet, to look at him, he appeared to be a facsimile of the accepted type of cultivated colourless prosperity. His mouth was absolutely faultless and expressionless, his features regular, his head benign.

"I guess I'll go to bed; I've got to see the Dook at ten," said his Excellency.

We accompanied him to his apartments, where he bade us sit down until he returned from his dressing-room.

I looked pathetically at Osborne, who shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Don't be shocked; he's uncultivated, if you like, but he's too kindly to be vulgar, and too upright to be ignorant. His honesty confuses the diplomats; he is fearless and direct; he says exactly what he thinks; he never lies, never flatters, never hesitates. And the root of his success is his sublime faith in the greatness and justice of the country he represents."

"I wish he wouldn't speak French," I said.

"It is not affectation, it is an honest desire to shirk nothing that may confirm the dignity of his position and the infallibility of his country."

A moment later his Excellency appeared in a long

nightshirt and pink slippers, a bottle in one hand, a corkscrew in the other.

Osborne uncorked the bottle of American Rye; his Excellency sat down, gravely acknowledging our raised glasses; then we silently crooked elbows and took our nightcaps without a shudder.

"Seen the Dook?" asked his Excellency, looking at me over his eye-glasses and licking his lips.

I replied in the negative.

"Been in prison, haven't you?" he continued, calmly.

I turned crimson to the root of every hair on my head. How on earth did he know I had been in prison? Osborne looked at me in astonishment.

"Why didn't you report to me, my son?" said his Excellency, kindly.

"I promised Giroux not to," I muttered.

"It ain't your dooty to make promises," he said; "you let me judge."

He did not speak harshly; he simply told me that he had been informed about my being mistaken for Prince Edric, and that my conduct in prison had been neither prudent nor dignified.

"A complaint came to me concerning your behaviour," he said. "I'm requested to have the Government recall you, Hardy."

"Recall me?" I stammered.

"But I ain't agoing to," he continued. "I guess the young lady got her deserts that time."

Mortified and miserable, I could not bear to meet Osborne's eyes; I sat staring at the carpet, too unhappy to even wonder at his Excellency's knowledge of my prison romance.

"I got the letter an hour ago," he said. "I guess I needn't say who the lady is; but she's mad clear through, and wants you out of the country."

So the Countess had declared war, and hostilities had begun! And this was the Countess's vengeance —a denunciation that might disgrace me and send me where I would never again offend her eyes, where the sight of me or the mention of my name would never evoke the souvenir of her humiliation.

"It seems," continued his Excellency, "that she went to see another prisoner. Who was he?"

"You know, sir," I replied, in a low voice.

"Yes, I guess I do—and I guess I know why she went, too. No use in discussing that; she told me long ago she meant to keep him out of Luxembourg. That young man may get us all into trouble. But you did quite right, Lootenant, in claiming right of asylum in our Legation. C'est nôtre droit, eh?"

So he even knew about the riot!

"Are they going to extradite him?" I asked, in alarm.

"I guess not, Hardy. The Emperor knows he can't make omelets without breaking the eggs. There's no treaty between Prussia and Luxembourg that covers political offences; and the United States won't allow bullying."

His Excellency rose; Osborne lighted the bedroom candles and extinguished the lamp.

"When you're aide-de-camp," said his Excellency, winking at me, "you'll find it safer to smoke in a powder-bin than to make love to a certain young lady we know of."

I bade him good-night with a heavy heart, and followed Osborne out.

"But who the deuce is the young lady?" inquired Osborne, devoured by curiosity.

I replied: "Go to Guinea!" and, entering my bedroom, double-locked the door—as if keys and bolts could keep out care!

They could not.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FOREST OF ARDEN

Detailing some emotions peculiar to the love-lorn, and treating of a young man's relapse into the barbarism of superstitions

On Monday I went to Wilverwiltz, alone, for his Excellency was obliged to remain in Luxembourg until his note to Berlin, concerning the incident at the Legation, had been answered. Osborne remained with his Excellency, and the callow *personnel* of the Legation, the second secretary, the interpreter, and the non-com. staff, of course remained also.

I took with me my six new Luxembourg uniforms, my United States uniforms, and all the civilian clothes I possessed, including a serviceable shooting-suit.

As I inspected my luggage piled up on the station platform I felt like an entire theatrical troupe, especially as my banjo crowned the top of the heap and Osborne's curly hunting-horn lay beside it.

The railway journey to Wilverwiltz took three hours, although it is not more than thirty miles from Luxembourg. I wished it had taken all day, for the single narrow-guage track ran through a fairy-land of the most captivating forest scenery I had ever looked upon. From the open window of my compartment I breathed the incense of the woods, the aromatic spice of evergreens, the fresh exhalation from brook and

fen, the perfume of sun-curled fern. Where the sunlight fell strong and hot the odour was sweetest; I sniffed like a caged thing at the free world. Hints of ripe raspberries in the pungent puffs of wind thrilled me with that sudden home-desire that is not entirely painful. From the slow train window I could look into cool moss-grown depths where every tree was an invitation, every leaf a promise. The slow flowing streams tempted me; the sudden tumbling rivulets, singing with foam, set my ears a-tingle; the flutter and glance of feathered wings, the visions of startled wild things, the continuous escort of clouds of butterflies, and everywhere the blessed sunshine and the million leaves!—these are my memories of that morning through the Ardennes Forest.

Nature never betrayed a heart that loved her; Nature, "ye Vicar of Almightie Godde," teaches us to love our friends — and were it not for religion, that teaches us to love our enemies, we might not know we had any.

And the old song came to me:

"From Wilverwiltz to Wiltz—
Whenne skies be grey
And Maydes away,
Godde's angels walk the woodland
Until the monthe of Maye,
In happy holliday.

"From Wilverwiltz to Wiltz—
When skies be fayre
And Lovers pair,
The deyvil haunts the woodland
Where Cupid sets hys snare.
Pray Godde that we be there!"

And the quaint lilt of the chorus, set to the swing of sounding hunting-horns :

"The red deer sleepeth deep at noon—
Kneeling on velvet knee ;
The red deer wakes with the crescent moon,
Seeketh hys love perdie !
The wild bee favours the rosemarie
Doth the bud that he savours close, Amie ?
Douce Amie ?
Halali-i !
Halali-i !
Pray you may kinder be !"

That the lovely Ardennes woods should make me silly did not surprise me, for "this is the forest of Arden," and every wild rose breathes of a perfumed past and every pebbled stream babbles of Rosalind.

If I chose to be sentimental, the sentiment was healthy ; everything here in the forest was sweet and real, and reeking of good rank earth. That mirage city, with its softened lights and shadows, its delicate tints, its quiet, its demi-slumber, weighed upon me as mist weighs down the sedge-grass with a million irridescent drops.

"Thank Heaven," said I to myself, "I'm out of that enchanted cobweb ;" for, while I remained in Luxembourg I had felt like a fly in amber. "Perhaps," thought I, wistfully, "the tonic of the woods may cure my fever too."

But that fever was not to be cured by thinking ; I knew that.

I was deep in a reverie, dreaming of the Countess of Wilverwiltz, when the train whistled, signalling the distant station ; and my heart began to beat out

the long-roll, warning me to arm for a battle already lost.

"One battle does not make a war," said I, aloud; "I'll call out reinforcements." So I drew a heavy draft on my stock of courage and, as the train came to a stand-still, I opened the compartment door, ready to face the devil himself—or even the Countess Amyce, if necessary.

There was nobody on the station platform except a red-capped official and a groom in the Duke's livery of light green and gold. The former took charge of my luggage; the latter conducted me to a dog-cart standing under the trees behind the little wooden station. So we left the deserted station, I driving, the mute groom, decorous, spotless as a green caterpillar, decorating the lower cushion beside me.

There was no sound in the forest; our wheels and hoofs made no noise in the soft bark road. But there was movement everywhere around us, glimpses of disappearing rabbits, apparitions of startled deer, flocks of forest birds rising and scattering into flight before us as we swept on through the woods in silence.

Then all at once the gray château appeared through the larger trees on the right and we swung into a broad macadamised avenue, through the three great gateways, and up the oak-bordered approach to a lodge where some foresters lifted their felt hats as we whirled by.

The Duchess and her young kinswoman, Mademoiselle Bettina d'Yssel, were sitting on the flowered terrace as I drove up. They greeted me very prettily when I advanced to pay my respects, regretting that

the Duke had been called to Luxembourg, but assuring me he would return on a special train at two o'clock, and saying that I was to find fault with everything that did not suit me and have it as I wanted.

"You see, monsieur, how my husband spoils you," she said; "but we are not at all metropolitan, and we are much interested in our very grand aide-de-camp."

"And so anxious to see you discipline the soldiers," said Mademoiselle d'Yssel. "When will you begin, Monsieur Hardy?"

"He might begin by disciplining young ladies who ask questions," said the Duchess, laughing.

At her Highness's invitation I went away to inspect my apartment, guided by a major-domo whose coat-tails hung heavy with bullion. The apartments were gorgeous—not too gorgeous for me, for I liked magnificence, and took to it with the naïve gratitude that a duck experiences afloat on a comfortable pond.

I dispensed, however, with a valet, who was included in the furnishings; I never could bear to have a man-servant touch me.

When I had dressed and superintended the unpacking, and when my orderly had unfolded and hung up my six new uniforms, I left him to finish his duty, and went down to the flower-terrace.

The Duchess and Bettina d'Yssel were on the lawn below, finding much amusement in knocking golf-balls as far as they could send them, digging up the turf at times, at times swinging over impotently, and laughing so that even the diminutive Luxembourg caddy smiled like a discreet cherub in a Louis XVI. woodcut.

They nodded merrily to me and offered to teach me,

but there was no time then, for luncheon, served under the trees, was announced by a human ornament in green and gold; and Bettina was hungry, and said so.

It was the simplest luncheon, faultlessly served by more human bric-à-brac. Bettina ate everything and drank very little Moselle and looked very hard at the champagne. The Duchess ate nothing. She sat smiling at Bettina's undisguised appetite, her white hands twisted over the arm of her chair, the sun streaming though the splendid ruddy coils of her hair. I could understand how everybody fell in love with her; she was so sweet, so sympathetic, so free from the consciousness of a beauty that had made her famous over two continents.

"You eat nothing," she said, looking up at me. Perhaps she read in my eyes the sincere compliment that my lips withheld, for she smiled and said with heightened colour: "My husband will be very glad to have a companion who is so fond of English sports; you know he was educated at Harrow and Oxford, and, later, at Woolwich."

"Do you fox-hunt?" asked Bettina, in solemn English, looking critically at me.

"'Fox' is superfluous, dear," said the Duchess; "your vocabulary is not yet in condition for the Quorn."

I observed the chagrin of Mademoiselle Bettina with amusement, saying that the Duchess knew more about hunting than I did.

And all the while, even when fascinated by the grace and beauty of the Duchess and the youthful innocence of Bettina, I was wondering where the Countess might be. It came out a little later.

"You know Prince Edric has taken Van Tassel's house — our former head forester?" inquired the Duchess.

"Yes," I said; "is it near?"

"It is half a mile," observed Bettina; "we will show it you after luncheon."

"There," continued the Duchess, "he is going to live all alone. It seems sad; he is so young—to be alone."

"He is going to collect birds and insects, and I am going to help him," said Bettina, incidentally helping herself to a glass of champagne, which the Duchess pleasantly deprived her of.

"There is something very touching in a young man leaving all—wealth, career, everything—to live alone in a foreign country," said the Duchess, dreamily.

That was where my rôle began; I saw the danger of the situation, the natural sympathy of this young wife—herself sick for a husband's sympathy. So I said:

"It is very natural, after all. Prince Edric cares more for quiet, more for freedom, more for his birds and beetles than he does for a window in the Brandenbourg Palace."

"So would I," said Bettina, picking up a bunch of grapes.

"But the loneliness of it!" said the Duchess.

Ah, the loneliness! Who but she should know what loneliness meant — she whose heart's hopeless isolation roused her to pity at the thought of others who might suffer what she suffered?

And that was dangerous too.

"No man is lonely whose thoughts are free," I said.

"The Prince is happiest when alone—now that he is no longer Prince."

"So princes are slaves, even in their thoughts?" asked the Duchess, faintly smiling.

"If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty,"

I quoted in English, and added: "As there is nothing about foxes in that, Mademoiselle d'Yssel may find it stupid."

"I do," began Bettina, cheerfully, but was restrained by the Duchess, who laid two white fingers on Bettina's wrist, and rose from her chair.

"Come," she said to the young girl; "remember Exercise 109; you didn't learn everything in the convent."

Bettina apparently disagreed with her Highness, but only said, wistfully: "I thought we were going to show Monsieur Hardy Prince Edric's little house."

"Perhaps Monsieur Hardy would rather find it for himself," said the Duchess, teasingly. "Really, Bettina, do you believe that everybody enjoys your company as well as I pretend to?"

"You do, don't you?" asked the young girl, looking at me with round, hazel eyes, in which, through all their innocent frankness, I caught the faintest glimmer of coquetry—only a glimmer that came from somewhere deep in the hidden womanhood within her.

"Exercise 109," said the Duchess, musingly.

I laughed.

"I think the Countess of Wilverwiltz must have

driven Prince Edric to Saint-Yssel; she has been away so long," said Bettina, making conversation an excuse to linger.

"Come, dear," said the Duchess, pleasantly, linking Bettina's arm in hers with a little *moue* of despair at me.

I attended them to the terrace, then retraced my steps across the lawn, and, entering the wood road, sauntered on into the forest.

A keeper, passing, gave me good-day, and pointed out the road that leads to Wiltz, where Prince Edric had established himself. I walked a little way on the Wiltz road, then turned back, for I was not yet ready to see Edric—or was it Edric I shrank from?

"Pooh," said I, "let her drive him all over Belgium; what do I care!"

I sat down on a grassy bank and lighted my pipe—a sign of trouble—for I never smoke pipes unless distressed in mind or body.

"I fancy she won't drive me about in her trap," I thought, bitterly; "if she drives me at all it will be across the frontier."

The forest was very still, save for those sudden dropping sounds that always come in forest silence—perhaps nuts falling before their time, perhaps twigs and leaves too early ripe.

A hedgehog gliding by like a sea-urchin on invisible wheels, poked his pointed snout at me and backed away with that half hiss, half grunt, indicative of hedgehog alarm and wrath. I tossed a pebble at him to make him curl up in a ball; and he did, lying there in underbrush like an enormous chestnut-bur.

A lithe stoat, slipping past, stopped to sniff at the

prickly inert mass, then glided on, sinuous as a sleek snake. Many a pheasant had nourished his glistening body, many a partridge's brains had furnished that marauding woodland epicure with best of cheer.

The sight of the stoat irritated me, although I do not have the inborn hatred that a keeper has for the enemies of his charges — badgers, polecats, stoats, weasels, otters, hedgehogs, hawks, kestrels, owls, herons, and magpies. On the contrary, I love them all—judiciously—and I fancy that kestrels and badgers seldom indulge in forbidden food when small birds and insects and vegetables are plenty. But a stoat—ugh !—it is as repulsive to me as a red-eyed ferret; and it's quite as murderous too. And as I sat thinking there under the trees, smoking to dull the pain in my heart until the hot pipe bit my tongue, far away through the forest I heard a whip-lash snap. Then I heard a fresh girlish voice singing in the distance, and the crack of the whip sounded nearer ; and presently a trap came into view, driven by a young lady who carolled away in high spirits and cracked her beribboned whip, oblivious of everything—of sky and wood and the stolid groom with folded arms behind her—oblivious of me, too, until I rose, red as fire, and took off my hat to Amyce de Wiltz, Countess of Wilverwiltz.

That my apparition was both surprising and unwelcome was evident. The Countess looked me full in the face, reining in her horse mechanically; then, with an inclination which was more cutting than a lash from her whip, passed on. A whiz of wheels, a vanishing sparkle of brightly shod hoofs, and the countenance of the moon-faced groom diminishing in a flurry of dust.

But her song had ceased at sight of me. I listened intently, long after she had gone. Perhaps she was tired of singing.

"The deuce take it!" said I, stepping out into the road where a shoe, flung from her horse's left hind-foot, lay glistening in the dust.

"The deuce take it!" I repeated; but I took it myself and handled it as better men than I handle holy relics.

"An imbecile superstition," said I, aloud. Nevertheless, I dropped it into the pocket of my jacket and looked guiltily around.

And I was greatly mortified to discover a young man, faultlessly attired, standing in the road behind me, examining me through a single eye-glass.

CHAPTER XV

THE HORSE-SHOE

Concerning an attempt to influence Fate undertaken by a young man in search of the Millennium

My first emotion was, as I say, mortification; my first instinct, resentment. At the same time I was glad that it had not been an inferior who witnessed my superstitious rite. A man understands weakness in his equals.

"Who stoops for luck must have twenty fingers," said the young man, screwing his eye-glass into his left eye. He gazed earnestly into the dust where, at my feet, the imprint of the horse-shoe lay. "Were there any nails in it?" he inquired, seriously.

"Five," I replied, with a reserve born of a growing suspicion.

"Five years' luck," he said, gayly; "and five's an odd number, too."

He bowed without embarrassment and offered me his hand, saying in English: "I'm glad I have such a lucky aide-de-camp! I fancy you are Lieutenant Hardy. How d'ye do! I'm Athel of Luxembourg."

I had suspected his identity, not because he resembled at all the idea I had of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg from his photographs, but because of his strongly marked English accent.

He appeared to be younger than his photographs

indicated, and, strangely enough, he was thoroughly English in type—tall, sunburned, with pleasant Saxon eyes, and that clean contour of cheek and chin characteristic of the Saxon Englishman. There was also that slight droop to his mustache that adds to the seriousness of expression so noticeable among the English. But he was a man's man, I saw that at once, and I liked him. Perhaps the Anglo-Saxon characteristics warmed my heart a little too. Englishmen are never foreigners, like the Irish or French; and blood is thicker than whiskey or vichy.

"And you think a superstitious aide-de-camp an acquisition?" I asked, smiling.

"Undoubtedly," he said. "I am as superstitious as any old wife who plants white-thorn to keep off lightning, or burns gorse to keep the devil from milking her cows. And I'm glad you found that horse-shoe."

"Luck came to the man who hatched thirteen chickens from a dozen eggs," I said, laughing, "but I've always suspected those dozen eggs were a 'baker's dozen.'"

"Don't disillusion me, it's bad luck!" he protested, also laughing; and he held up both hands, crossing the first and second fingers on each.

I gravely followed his example, making the mystic sign against evil, which pleased him immensely.

"Come," he said, heartily; "give me a man with a robust fear of bad luck and I'll show you a good Christian. Shall we walk? I drove to Saint-Yssel so I could walk across the woodland. I love walking, don't you? I love the woods, don't you? I knew you did; I noticed the little twitch of your nostril.

Come on; I'll show you what game God and the poachers have spared me. I wish I had my shooting-clothes—but come ahead, anyway."

Dressed faultlessly as he was, I dreaded to see his silk hat pierced by a pointed twig or his frock-coat covered with dock and ripped by briers. Both contingencies occurred, however, but he only said, "Damn it!" and continued his enthusiastic course through thickets and scarcely discernible trails, pointing out everything, delighted as a boy in a partridge covey.

He showed me an evil-looking bog, threaded by sluggish streams, and told me that the first flight of woodcock always dropped there.

We examined one or two hawk-traps, in one of which dangled a dead magpie; we knowingly knelt on the short turf, speculating about a badger who had, as usual, clumsily proclaimed his presence by scratching up the sod for a yard around a rabbit burrow.

"Foxes don't do that," I observed.

"They're too foxy," said the Duke, unconscious of any offense against the language. "A fox puts one paw in, dainty as a cat on wet leaves, if you please. I have a soft spot in my heart for poachers, whether they run on two legs or on four."

We put up plenty of pheasants and even a few wild ducks that, the Duke explained, bred on the Semois. Occasionally we heard the crashing of startled deer in the hill thickets, but saw no large game except a wild boar, covered with dust, rooting up turnips in a patch that bordered the western forest edge.

"Beyond," said the Duke, "lies the free Ardennes, where the wolves are. We manage to keep them out

of the preserve fairly well, though I have no doubt that there are some in here now."

Turning homeward, for the sun hung low above the blue trees in the west, we rambled through the splendid forest, exchanging confidential data concerning the influence of incubators on the plumage of the Amherst pheasant, and the disputed theory of relationship between ferrets and polecats.

Once or twice I ventured to mention the object of my presence in Luxembourg, but he said: "Oh, bother the army now; let's talk shot-gun! Do you mind?"

"No," I said, laughing, "but I thought you might care to give me an idea of what is contemplated."

"Perhaps I'd better," he replied, thoughtfully. "I saw his Excellency this morning, and he tells me that Germany has notified him that the Emperor cannot regard with unconcern any increase in the Luxembourg army."

"Good Heavens!" I blurted out. "That of course means war!"

"It will if your country stands by us," he said. "His Excellency has cabled and he expects instructions by the end of the week."

Of course that tied my hands for the time being; it disappointed me too, for I had begun to take the greatest interest in the reorganisation of the Luxembourg forces, and I had promised myself much pleasure in breaking in and brigading raw material as soon as the law proclaiming universal service had been promulgated.

The Duke asked me to give him an outline of my scheme, and I did so, even going into details of mobilisation and permanent garrisons. He was a trifle sur-

prised, I fancy, by my knowledge of a country so new to me. But he approved the whole scheme in the rough, saying, with a quizzical smile: "Of course the treasury is to be handled with gloves or my dear Baron d'Arlon may pull the purse-strings under our noses."

"But, surely," I said, "the Chamber of Deputies will vote appropriations for defence; even our Congress has been known to do that, at times!"

"My dear fellow," he said, seriously, "the Chamber of Deputies is as hopelessly imbecile as your Congress, and the mental stability of both is on a par with the stability of a French ministry or a South American republic. If the money is there, probably they won't vote it; if it isn't, they're apt to vote millions."

We came in sight of the château before he finished speaking, where, on the lawn, the Countess of Wilverwiltz, assisted by Bettina d'Yssel, was instructing a vicious-looking French bull-dog to jump through a hoop.

I felt the blood tingling my ears as we advanced along the shaded avenue towards the terrace, where the bull-dog ungallantly bolted from the ladies and flung his brindled body enthusiastically against the Duke's legs.

"Take your ungrateful dog, Monsieur le Duc!" cried Bettina, with flushed cheeks. "I hate ingratitude, even in a dog—and I gave Flic my last bon-bon!"

"Fear sometimes does Love's errands," said the Duke, smiling. "Flic might be more grateful for a cuff than a bon-bon."

"But you never strike Flic," said Bettina.

"And I never give Flic bon-bons," said the Duke, gravely.

"Which is the way to make *dogs* love you," observed the Countess, with brightening eyes.

The Duke's cheeks grew tense along the jaw, but he smiled and caressed the square eager head of the dog at his knee; and Flic panted and whined and adored, yawning spasmodically from over-indulgence in many emotions.

"You ennui me—tiens!" said Bettina to Flic, "I wish I had my bon-bon that you sat up for!"

The Duke, Flic at his heels, sauntered up to the terrace, saying he'd something better to do than to hear his dog maligned; but Bettina linked her arm lovingly in his and continued her denunciations of Flic until their laughing voices died out in the long hallway beyond the terrace.

If I had expected the Countess to go I found out my mistake. Uncomfortable as I was, alone there with her, I could not wish to be anywhere else, for that meant despair. I must go on loving her—there was no escape; and it almost angered me to confess it to myself.

"It displeases you that I have come to Wilverwiltz?" I said, with that rising inflection that in itself makes an observation deferential.

"It leaves me quite indifferent, monsieur," she said, without emotion.

"And if I talk to you?" I asked.

"Mon Dieu, Monsieur Hardy, I talk to Flic."

The sting of the words left my face burning, but I only said: "Pride is sometimes the greatest thing in the world—and it is sometimes the least. To endure proudly is noble; to revenge is to unmask."

She raised her eyebrows coolly and looked me in the eyes: "Et après?"

"Insolence is Pride with her mask pulled off," I said, distinctly.

She did not answer, but her eyes sparkled.

"Your intrigue to disgrace me was as cruel as it was useless," I said. "What satisfaction could it be to you to ruin my career?"

"I do not wish to," she replied; "you will do that act of justice for yourself."

"You mean if one gives a rascal rope he'll lynch himself?" I asked, trying to swallow the bitterness of this futile duel of words. But I was no sword-swallower.

"Perhaps I mean that."

I could not speak, for the hot anger choked me; yet, through it all—through the misery of her hate for me—I knew I loved her so well that even she must suspect it.

"You are too clever to plot with others for my destruction," I said; "many heads obstruct intrigue, and slowest insects have most legs. The Spanish Inquisition working Sundays and holidays would hurt no less than a cutting word from you."

The Countess laughed a melodious little laugh, utterly mirthless. Then she said:

"When the cat surprised the mouse in the sugar-bowl, the mouse said: 'I love you; come into the bowl and we'll eat sugar—if you are hungry.'"

She said it in Flemish, not caring—perhaps hoping I would not understand. It was an insolent speech; it was doubly vindictive in Flemish.

"If I judge the Countess of Wilverwiltz justly," I said, in a low voice, "I *think* she already regrets that speech."

The colour flew to her face and the impulsive words came, even before I finished.

"I do regret it," she said; "I am ashamed. I hate you so heartily that I want a respectful hatred from you in return."

That she could desire anything from me, even hatred, was something. "Love me! Hate me! Only don't be indifferent," is the truest axiom ever misunderstood.

"You have the respect," I said, "I can't promise you the hatred." And the expression on my face was as good as "I love you." And she knew it.

But she had made up her mind to hate—and she did hate with a determination that amazed and discouraged me. Given a cordial dislike founded on injured pride, add to that a desire to humiliate the object of dislike, and to that add the failure to humiliate! The result is a healthy hatred that time will either strengthen or uproot.

"If I can make you suffer for what you have made me suffer," she said, "it will be justice, not revenge. If I can teach you a lesson that may save some other woman's pride, I shall do it."

I said nothing.

She took one step towards the terrace, then stood still.

"I know what men's consideration for women is. And it is revolting to know it. I never saw a man worthy of any woman—no, not the most spotless among you. And to be humiliated by one of you—!"

She lifted the hem of her summer gown daintily—perhaps because there was a little dew on the turf.

Then she went around the corner of the house, returning my bow with a pretty inclination of her small head.

"In the meantime," said I to myself, "I have the horse-shoe with five nails. Doubtless the millennium is at hand—perhaps it's hiding just around the corner of the house—"

I went to look. If the millennium was concealed somewhere among the flower-beds I did not find it.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RENDEZVOUS

Containing examples of phenomena peculiar to healthy-minded young men in love; also the results of an experiment in doing yourself what you despise in others

THE next morning I awoke to the ear-splitting pæon of a peacock, an imperious bird, who stood on the marble terrace and saluted the rising sun in a voice as metallic as his own plumage. The sun stared above the forest like the red, smoky lens of a light-house, pulsating with hidden fires; and all around the blue ashes of the night faded to gray, to pearl, and then, once more afire, glowed and scattered into flecks of silver, saffron, and rose.

In spite of the sunrise and the peacock I would gladly have gone to sleep again, but a small bird, species unnoted and probably unimportant to anybody except the bird itself, came and sat on my window-ledge, and twittered and peeped and piped and trilled until nervous astonishment drove me to investigate my tormentor. When it saw me it said, "Tweet! twe-et!"

The bird was ridiculously small to make such noises and of so many kinds. It had a dove-coloured head, with black cheeks and salmon-tinted undergarments. Music appeared to spurt from it as water sprays from a leaky hose.

After a while it flitted away; and I, all desire for sleep extinguished by the shower of gratuitous melody, sat down at the open window and, chin on hand, gazed into the vague blue woodland where the ghosts of the night mist drifted, tall sheeted spectres of pond and stream, returning to the clouds again. On the dim lawn below, as yet unwarned by the mist-shot sun, two magpies quarrelled and chased each other through the dew until the French bull-dog, Flic, charged them with hysterical yelps and unwarranted faith in his bandy legs.

The château, as far as its human tenants were concerned, was silent. However, I bathed and dressed, determined to pay Prince Edric a sunrise visit and shame him for a naturalist and a soldier.

As I descended the terrace, the peacock, all shimmering in metallic golden greens and purples, puffed out his sapphire breast, clicked his tail open like a fan, and, chocolate-coloured wings trailing, slowly pivoted, displaying a rear view not at all remarkable. I wonder why it is that peacocks do that?

Flic came and sniffed at my gaiters. Perhaps he respected the odour of guns and game that clung to my shooting-jacket, for he did not bite me. However, he ignored my invitation for a forest stroll, and I went on alone over the dew-drenched lawn and down the road to the forest.

As I walked I thought of the Countess as I had seen her the night before, silent, perhaps preoccupied, perhaps the contrary, but always sufficiently alert to ignore me completely. Not that she had the bad taste to show it pointedly; she accomplished it without effort and without embarrassing me. Perhaps

it cut more deeply on that account, although I was the only one present who appreciated my artistic isolation—as far as she was concerned.

"It is more expensive to revenge injuries than to bear them," thought I to myself; "although to those rich in vengeance a mere matter of expense is nothing. I suppose she'll do it sooner or later; patience and meditation work miracles—and the pope's mule waited seven years to kick."

It was a mean metaphor, even for a man.

As I walked along the Wiltz road, reflectively chewing a grass-stem, it occurred to me that the world was too fair, too fresh and innocent, too peaceful for hatred and sadness. I looked at the foliage, arching the moist forest road, I saw the sun's jewels flash in dew-soaked spiders' films on wet bushes and diamond-crusted grass-blades; I heard mottled wood birds trilling the happiness of living, I heard the still movements of a million tiny things awakening to life and motion. And sounds and colour and form and movement united in one vast, silent, thrilling harmony, a hymn of praise, praising the ecstasy of living.

"If a man can feel that way before breakfast," thought I, "he may not perhaps be fit for paradise, but he certainly wouldn't make a bad husband. Oh, Amyce! Amyce!"

This may sound sentimental unless you remember that "this is the forest of Arden."

"Thank Heaven for that," said I, aloud; "if Arden is a lover's asylum, it is much pleasanter than other resorts for incurables."

About this time, my madness being upon me, I began to recite aloud as I walked:

"Her breath, like to the whispering winde,
Was calm as thought, sweete as her minde;
Her lips, like coral gates, kept in
The perfume and the pearls within;
Her eyes, a double-flaming torch
That always shine and never scorch;
Herselfe, the Heav'n in which did meet
The all of bright, of fair and sweet."

And I meant every word of it too; and, though the Countess Amyce was doubtless still dreaming peacefully—perhaps of my future discomfiture—I bravely celebrated her:

"Up with the jolly bird of light
Who sounds his third retreat to-night,
Fair Amyce, from her snowy bed,
Ashamed starts and rises red
As the carnation-mantled morn."

I waved one hand and continued:

"So like the Provance rose she walkt
Flowered with blush, with verdure stalkt;
Th' officious wind her loose hayre curls,
The dewe her happy linen purls,
But wets a tress, which instantly
Sol with a crisping beame doth dry."

But mere recitation was not enough; song alone could relieve my swelling heart. And I carolled lustily, as I had often chanted, the famous Seventh Cavalry anthem of *Barney Riley:*

"Sing out, pent souls, sing cheerfully!
Care shackles you in liberty;
Mirth frees you in captivity.
Would you double fetters adde?
Else why so sadde?"

Before I had finished the last bar I stood in front of Wiltz Lodge, Prince Edric's modest retreat. And I might have sung the second verse had not Prince Edric opened a shutter and leaned out with an annoyed questioning expression that discouraged me.

When he saw who it was he laughed, rubbed his sleep-dimmed eyes, stifled a yawn, laughed again, and said: "O Orlando Furioso, enter into thy heritage!

> "Pray, Orlando, don't turn back!
> Share the cottage
> And the pottage
> Of thy melancholy Jacques!"

which is as good verse as you can expect from a drowsy German, eh?"

A squatty, blond servant, with no perceptible eyebrows and a shock of colourless hair clipped pompadour, opened the door for me, but I preferred to sit on the stone piazza outside until Edric had tubbed and groomed himself.

"Hungry?" he inquired, buttoning his collar and leaning out of the broad window beside me.

"Not at all," I said, sarcastically; "I never eat anything—except my words, now and then."

"Oho! Have you breakfasted? Guten appetit!"

"Thanks. I once said there were no good Germans but dead Germans. I'll eat those words as an appetiser; but, for Heaven's sake, hurry breakfast!"

The breakfast was chocolate, tartines à la campagne, peaches, grapes, melons, and the sweet water of the Ardennes springs, limpid and icy.

Edric, lounging thoughtfully in a piazza chair,

watched me manage a tartine in a manner peculiar to the peasantry of Normandy.

"That's right," he said; "its barbarous but delicious. Who cares what an imbecile civilisation thinks!"

"I don't—just now," I said, brandishing another tartine.

The canary-tinted servant, whose name was Nicola, came to remove the cloth and deposit finger-bowls, but Edric said: "Set 'em down and go away and do something somewhere."

"Where?" asked Nicola, bewildered.

"Where? I told you to do something somewhere or anything anywhere, didn't I?"

And Nicola, a trifle wild-eyed, began to roam about in an aimless daze until he encountered a doorway, which he mechanically entered and disappeared for the rest of the morning.

Edric lighted his cigar and asked me how I liked Wilverwiltz; and I told him, omitting all reference to the Countess.

"Yes," he said, "the Duchess is charming. It's a pity Athel can't appreciate her. As for the others, they're well enough—"

"Well enough!" I repeated, a trifle incensed that he should include Amyce in "well enough."

"Don't you think so? Have you met the Countess of Wilverwiltz?"

"Yes, I've met her," I said.

"Yesterday she drove me in her trap all over the forest," said Edric, resentfully. "I had intended to search for the kestrel's nest that Nicola says contains young. I wanted to identify a feather I found in the woods, too, but—well, I drove a trap."

I could have beaten him. Fancy a man mousing about after birds and feathers when he could drive in a trap with a wingless angel!

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Oh, it's the forest of Arden, I suppose," I answered; "I'm looking for Rosalind."

"I found her—once," he said, in a low voice.

I looked curiously around the wood-and-stone house, for it was here that Prince Edric had met his fate—the beautiful Luxembourg peasant girl. And I knew it was because of her memory that he had come to live in Van Tassel's lodge, here in the Ardennes forest.

"What is the use of searching the world for a woman whose name I do not know?" he asked. "If she has once been here, perhaps she will come again."

"It is strange," I ventured, "that you can find no trace of her in this vicinity."

He replied simply: "It is very strange. Nobody within miles recognises my description; nobody ever heard of Van Tassel's niece. I am, little by little, scouring the whole province. It may take many months. After that—after I once am certain she is not in Luxembourg—I shall search the towns."

"And then?"

"I don't know," he said.

The sad shadows under his eyes began to deepen; he stared at a patch of sunshine on the piazza floor where a silver-bronzed beetle, a Buprestis, I believe, stood investigating a crack in the boards with tiny restless antennæ.

To divert his thoughts I advanced an absurd theory concerning the functions of coleoptera antennæ, and

he was lured into a discussion that ended with a magnifying-glass and the temporary imprisonment of the astonished silver-bronze Buprestis.

"All right," I said; "fads are pills to purge melancholy, and the devil hires the unemployed."

"Do his wages suit?" asked Edric, maliciously.

"Oh! you've heard that I am temporarily unemployed because your government wants to know, you know — eh? Well, my bacteriological friend, the hardest work is to wait for a chance to work. So I'm very busy. Good-bye."

He walked a few steps with me, holding the silver Buprestis on the back of his hand.

"What about my extradition?" he said.

"Nothing. There's no law for it, and his Excellency stands to back up the government."

He held out his hand, palm down. After a moment the silver beetle clicked open its polished elytra and sailed away into the sunshine.

"See how my riches take wings," he said; "like my hopes—"

"Pooh!" I observed; "all that glitters isn't beetles; you can catch another specimen by sitting still on your own porch. Edric, you are morbid." We shook hands after a second's hesitation.

"I saw old Vossburg in the woods yesterday," he said; "he disappeared like a fat gray rat in a sewer."

"The deuce you did!" I cried, disagreeably startled.

"It was inevitable," continued the Prince, shrugging his broad shoulders. "I did not expect to hide, nor do I wish to; but now, thank God! my front door is *my* door, and when I shut it I needn't explain why to a court-martial."

There was a brief silence; then I said: "You are alone here?"

"Well, upon my word!" he murmured, much amused; "you are not worrying about that, are you?"

"No," said I; "any man as handy with a revolver as you are—"

He reddened, and I spared him, for it was a sore point, and he hated to be eulogised as "Edric, the Robber Prince of the Rhine."

He promised, however, to keep an eye on any prowling German emissaries, and again we shook hands warmly, he turning back to his cottage, I walking briskly into the woods.

I had been swinging along for ten minutes, perhaps, taking a longer road instead of the straight Wiltz route, when, directly ahead of me, I saw Vossburg and Wiepert, sitting on the grassy bank beside the road, absorbed in conversation.

The soft bark path had not carried the sound of my footsteps to their ears. I stepped back instinctively, and, as I watched them through the bushes at the bend of the road, I was certain they had not noticed me.

The very sight of that uncanny old man repelled me, and Wiepert's rusty, sepulchral visage was scarcely more edifying. What were those unpleasant old birds about? They were hatching something between them; probably, like a pair of cuckoos, the schemes they laid were to be hatched by nobler birds.

"William the Sudden is up to more mischief," thought I; "his Excellency must know that these vagabonds have appeared in Wilverwiltz."

"THEY STOOD AT THE SIDE OF HER HORSE, HAT IN HAND"

To avoid
duplication

I have no appetite for spying. I should, no doubt, have gone on and asked them their business had not a thing occurred that startled me into prudence; for, before I could emerge from my thicket of filbert bushes, the Countess of Wilverwiltz, superbly mounted, dashed around the bend of the road at a gallop and drew bridle directly beside that pair of vagabonds. It was unmistakably a rendezvous.

They stood on each side of her horse, hat in hand, and, though the distance was too far for me to understand what they said, I could see that they were eagerly communicating to her something that she found most interesting.

For ten minutes the conversation continued, the Countess leaning forward as though listening to words that alternately amazed and angered her. At times she touched her horse impatiently with the loop on her riding-crop, and the spirited mare resented it. I wished the horse might quietly kick that pair of jail-birds into eternity.

It amazed me to see the Countess of Wilverwiltz hobnobbing with German spies; it angered and sickened me, too; and I would gladly have wriggled out of the bushes and gone back the other way, but I did not care to be caught emerging from such a hiding-place, for I knew the Countess would not spare me.

Then, too, if I had not feared she might misunderstand my motive, I should have gone out and taken a hand in the proceedings. For those spies—Vossburg, at all events—had committed a murderous assault on Prince Edric. Yet, even if I had been alone, how was I, unarmed, to arrest that loathsome old man? I

couldn't strike him; his bloated head of white woolly hair forbade it. I couldn't menace him, for I had no pistol. As for dragging him to Wilverwiltz, that was out of the question; his unnatural strength prevented it.

My patience was almost at an end when at last the Countess straightened up in her saddle, shook out her bridle, and galloped down the road, straight past my clump of bushes, and away into the forest towards Wiltz.

Vossburg and Wiepert crossed the road immediately and entered the dense forest, perhaps by some hidden *sentier* that I could not see. At any rate, they disappeared almost as quickly as the Countess; and I, puzzled, suspicious, angry, and disgusted, pulled myself out of the filbert covert and started for the château.

"He that proves too much proves nothing," thought I; "and also it is probably true that he who proves nothing proves too much for his own health—where the Countess of Wilverwiltz is concerned. I'll think a great deal, but I doubt if I say much to anybody except his Excellency."

CHAPTER XVII

CONSPIRACY

An account of a dramatic entry, a theatrical exit, and the opinion of two fools concerning the folly of a third

For a week I ignored the Countess as successfully as she ignored me; and it gratified me to observe that she resented it. But I had plenty to occupy me: regiments to raise, on paper; fortresses to garrison, in my dreams; castles to build, in the beautiful sunny air of the most beautiful spot in northern Europe, Wilverwiltz. I played golf with the young Duchess, I rowed Bettina on the artificial lake until my head spun, I even made Flic's acquaintance by means of bon-bons, and a friend of him forever by cuffing him soundly for chasing a bantam hen.

I shot a few logy pheasants with the Duke, made a spectacle of myself by missing a lot of ratlike partridges one hot day in the stubble, and finally "wiped the eye" of his Highness by killing ten snipe to his two after an infernal voyage through a peat-bog, in the course of which I am sure my legs were pulled out half an inch and have remained so ever since.

There was news from his Excellency which troubled us. Luxembourg was swarming with German spies, he said, and he warned us to see that the army was not being tampered with. As far as regarded Germany's protest concerning the augmentation of the

army, we had as yet received no final word from the United States government, but the Secretary of State had advised us to do nothing for the present, so that settled it, except for my paper schemes. But, on paper, Luxembourg was already one of the most formidably armed conglomerations of fortresses in Europe.

There had been a few guests at the château, though the Duke courted retirement and the society of his dogs and guns; and the young Duchess had no heart for gaieties, although she pretended she had, and showed such undisguised pleasure in Prince Edric's company when he came to Wilverwiltz that I wondered something unpleasant didn't happen.

One of the excitements of the week was the activity of two or three wolves, not in the free Ardennes, but in the preserve itself. The deer suffered a good deal, and the Duke, after vainly scouring the preserve, directed the digging of wolf-pits and the placing of thirty-pound steel wolf-traps—a work I voluntarily superintended with his Highness and Prince Edric.

A coldness had sprung up between the Prince and his Highness; it was not exactly visible, but there was a certain restraint in their relations which set me thinking that the Duke might some day make the effort to swallow his own abnormal sensitiveness and try to understand his wife.

She also was at fault; she was ice itself to the Duke —ice tempered with the cold sunlight of her mirthless smile. And I could see, even in a week, that they were drifting further from each other and involving two absolutely innocent people in the meshes of their suspicion and distress—Edric and Bettina.

Yet the Duchess clung the closer to the girl, perhaps because she feared Bettina was the nearest she might ever come to her husband's love, and the Duke avoided Edric, which is a man's instinct under such circumstances.

As for the Countess and myself, we were so oblivious of each other that nobody noticed it except ourselves. Altogether it was a most unhappy little court, except that Bettina had a good time; and Edric, never imagining himself under suspicion, moped at his ease over his beautiful Luxembourgeoise and collected many rare specimens of uninteresting things. Yes, Bettina and Flic were the only two beings in Wilverwiltz heart whole and fancy free. Bettina had mourned the ingratitude of Flic until I suggested that she cuff him. After that they adored each other by the hour.

If the days succeeded each other without bringing any open unpleasantness to the little court at Wilverwiltz, they also passed without gaiety. At dinner we were a subdued company; the Duke, listless, preoccupied, said little to the Duchess, less to me, and scarcely addressed a word to his honest old adjutant, Colonel de Ruyter, a Hollander just returned from a mission to The Hague. The Duchess, apparently indifferent, chatted with Bettina and the Countess, perfectly aware of the latter's growing dislike for the Duke, yet too proud to acknowledge that her friend, who loved her, resented the neglect of her husband.

The Countess's attitude towards Edric occupied me too. She had never forgotten her suspicions concerning Edric's supposed infatuation for the Duchess, and now that the Duchess found the Prince so frankly com-

panionable, I could see that Amyce believed I had deceived her and that Edric really had come to Luxembourg for love of the unhappy young Duchess.

The general misapprehensions, the growing misunderstandings, made me uncomfortable. The Duchess, in her desperate desire to find forgetfulness for her own trouble, was innocently involving Edric; the Duke saw everything, and his cold reserve towards Edric increased until I understood that sooner or later something unfortunate was certain to happen.

That Athel of Luxembourg loved his wife I was convinced; that he felt she had never cared for him was also apparent. Their marriage had been a marriage of expediency for dynastic reasons, a passionless, political bargain; and between two sensitive young people, who, after the moral degradation of such a union, shrank from keeping up the farce, there could be nothing intimate, nothing of confidence, nothing except a mutual reserve and distrust, if not resentment. They had carried out their part of the bargain; being young and sensitive, they felt the shame of it. And now, to further distress them, they had, after a year's marriage, fallen so deeply in love with each other that each suspected the other's pity and contempt, and neither dared hope for more than toleration in their unhappy and ignoble partnership.

So the week passed in an atmosphere unpleasantly ominous, until even Bettina felt the oppression, and took long, silent promenades with Flic around the park wall in search of grasshoppers—the only game that Flic was allowed to chase.

On Sunday there was early mass, attended in state by the court; eight-o'clock mass; service with

sermon at eleven; and, at four, vespers. It is wonderful how devoutly the devout can dwell together in discord.

On Monday, shortly after morning coffee had been served, a telegram was handed to the Duke from his Excellency, warning us that the garrison at Luxembourg was being tampered with by foreign agents.

About ten o'clock the Duke, in full uniform, followed by his good old adjutant, Colonel de Ruyter, and by me, gathered at the gate booted and spurred, ready to ride to the railway station.

My tight crimson uniform and steel-bound flat shako made me feel strange and suspicious; I dreaded to encounter the eyes of the Countess, although Bettina, bless her heart, declared it the most beautiful uniform in the world—which, after all, was her world, and included nearly the entire Duchy of Luxembourg.

The Duchess, standing on the terrace, returned her husband's ceremonious salute without a word. Her lovely eyes were hard and bright, but in either cheek the pale colour spread to her white neck. What a silly pair they were!

"Bring me back something," cried Bettina, as I rode past the terrace wall, mastering my nervous black horse with difficulty.

"What has he worth your asking?" said the Countess, covering her thrust under a gay laugh; "nothing is worth the price men pay at Vanity Fair!"

So I set my teeth and galloped on after his Highness, who, with Colonel De Ruyter, was already kicking up the dust beyond the third gate.

We found a locomotive, a box-stall car, and an

American drawing-room car awaiting us at the little wooden station. It was the Duke's "special train," always side-tracked there, steam up. A dozen grooms, in light-green and gold livery, embarked our horses in the box-stall car; we entered the drawing-room car, the engineer blew a gay blast from his whistle, the flunkies stood in line, hats off, and away we went, faster, faster, until the fringing forest was a running streak of green through storms of dust and gravel whirling upward.

"We'll be there in an hour," said the Duke, lighting his cigar; "we are going a mile in two minutes." He made a gesture as though shaking a weight from his broad shoulders.

Black Care rides behind the horseman; the engineer opens the throttle, but Black Care flags the train.

The Duke swung about in his revolving arm-chair, and looked mischievously at De Ruyter, who sat twisting his white moustache in moody reverie.

"Come," he said, "don't take things so hard. Suppose the German agents have bribed a dozen stupid soldiers to shout, 'Hoch dem Kaiser!'"

"Dead soldiers are no longer stupid," said De Ruyter, grimly.

"Nonsense," laughed the Duke; "I'll have no tragedies in my army. I'll have them soundly spanked and sent home to their mothers—those soldiers who prefer his Majesty to me. Voilà tout!"

"I never trusted Toxé," said De Ruyter, dryly, "nor Latrille."

I had heard about Toxé and Latrille, two Alsatian officers in the sole regiment which constituted the

Grand Duke's army. I had not yet met these gentlemen, so when De Ruyter glanced at me for an indorsement I remained silent.

"Colonel Toxé is an able officer," said the Duke, gravely; "Major Latrille has discharged his duties with perfect correctness. I have no cause for the slightest suspicion against those two officers."

De Ruyter, head bent, still worrying his moustache, said nothing in reply, and, after a moment, the Duke turned to me:

"We'll be back by mid-day," he said. "I've told the under forester to have the beaters at the first carrefour by one o'clock. I tell you, I'm going to clean out those wolves before they do any more deer-killing."

That his Highness's mind should be occupied with details for a wolf-drive when affairs in Luxembourg appeared almost sinister disappointed me. I saw old De Ruyter's face grow darker as the Duke went on, pleasantly:

"I have asked the Countess to drive you down; Bettina will drive me."

"But," I blurted out, "there will be no time for a wolf-drive this afternoon."

"Rubbish! This Luxembourg business will not take us twenty minutes."

There was nothing further for me to say. I lay back, smoking gloomily, scarcely enchanted by the prospect of a tête-à-tête drive with the Countess Amyce. For I was becoming tired of the constant strife, the veiled distrust, the open enmity.

Dissimulation wearied me; the hopeless struggle against her prejudice and scorn began to have an effect

that surprised me at times, and that effect was a feeling towards her dangerously akin to indifference. For I had tired of hope as a steady diet. Hope is the bread of the unhappy, but the devil also bakes that sort of dough, and his customers die of hunger.

"I don't see," said the Duke, irritably, "why you and De Ruyter should look like funeral directors."

"For a mourning ceremony your Highness would make an invaluable centre-piece," I said, frankly.

"Do I look that way, too?" he asked, reddening. "Well, it's not the army that worries me, gentlemen."

"Nor the wolves, either," I said.

We looked straight into each other's eyes. He rose and started towards the platform, and I, suddenly resolved, sprang up and joined him.

He looked back over his shoulder; it was an evil glance he gave me, but I followed him out onto the vestibule platform and closed the car door behind us. Then I asked permission to speak on matters concerning the whole nation; and again he looked me straight in the eyes, neither consenting nor refusing permission.

"If your Highness regards me," I said, bitterly, "as a meddler or an impertinent, then there is nothing to be said."

His youthful face changed; he touched his drooping mustache, and said: "I have already come to look upon you as a brother officer."

The reproof was so gentle, so manly, and yet so unmistakable, that I could only bow in silence. Clearly he would brook no interference in his private affairs, and he was, perhaps, right; although it concerned the whole nation that their Duke and Duchess should at least attempt to understand each other. If somebody

could only have taken him by those broad shoulders and shaken him, and said: "You infernal idiot! Your wife is in love with you—!"

I went back into the car, where old De Ruyter sat hunched up in his chair, nursing his spurred boots and muttering, and there we smoked in silence until the train slowed up and stopped at the Luxembourg station; and we followed the Duke to the platform, where, in a minute or two, our horses were brought around.

We mounted and rode out across the railway, traversed the viaduct at a gallop, and made straight for the barracks, followed by an increasing crowd of curious citizens.

The sentinels at the gates hurriedly called out the guard, the gate-house swarmed, the guard-house vibrated with the roll of drums. I, following close behind his Highness, caught a glimpse of flags dipping in salutes, of long rows of glittering rifle-barrels, of sabres raised; then we dashed into the vast gravel parade, and drew bridles amid a whirlwind of dust.

The regiment was at drill, field and staff mounted, when we entered the parade, and our somewhat sudden if not dramatic appearance disconcerted the colonel. The moment I saw him I distrusted him. He came up to pay his respects to the Duke, followed by Major Latrille, both superbly mounted.

Toxé, a square-faced, hard-eyed man, frightfully pitted with small-pox scars, acquitted himself with the precision and brusque, snappy deportment of a Prussian; and although his name was French and his nationality Alsatian, I never saw a more unmistakable Prussian in all my life.

To me he was polite, precise, and alert, yet under it all I felt the sinister sneer of a foreigner who, though his own conscience may be clear, suspects evil in others.

As for his major, Latrille, I disliked him as spontaneously as I had his superior. He was very young, very soft, and highly coloured, with a weak mustache calling attention to a weaker mouth and chin. Besides, he had eyes that, in a woman, would have been beautiful—great velvety blue eyes, heavily shaded by curling lashes. And never once during our interview did he look anybody but Toxé in the face.

What the Duke said to Toxé I couldn't hear, for they sat on their horses, apart. Presently, however, at a gesture from his Highness, I, followed by Latrille, Toxé, and De Ruyter, fell in behind him, and we rode across the parade and dismounted at the officers' quarters.

Meanwhile the regiment had been drawn up for inspection, and Giroux also had arrived with a company of gendarmes, which proceeding was viewed with uneasiness by Latrille and Toxé, and probably by more than half of the troops under arms.

At a sharp order from the Duke himself, who advanced on foot, accompanied by Toxé, Giroux, and by me, the troops unslung knapsacks, each soldier depositing his pack, unstrapped and open for inspection, at his feet.

The Duke passed slowly along the rigid lines, not noticing the open knapsacks, but scanning the visage of each soldier with keen, relentless eyes.

Suddenly he stopped short in front of one young sergeant, who promptly turned white as a sheet.

"Search!" said the Duke; and Giroux bent down and rummaged in the knapsack, flinging woollen socks, shirts, and cap-covers about until he found what he had been looking for—a sheet of paper, printed in Flemish, French, and German. Toxé bit his thick underlip, but stood rigid as a post; Giroux, red and perspiring, handed the circular to me; and, as I took it, I saw at a glance what it was—an appeal to the people to rise and overthrow the government and shout for his consecrated Majesty, William the Sudden.

"Fall out!" said the Duke, in a passionless voice.

The miserable soldier stepped from the ranks; a movement like a shudder passed through the long lines.

Then his Highness turned and spoke to the regiment quietly, not raising his voice; but every word was perfectly distinct in the still air, and every soldier there heard:

"Soldiers! If the treason among you were proportionate to your stupidity, the nation might justly be alarmed. But nothing can equal your stupidity; the nation is safe."

He turned to Giroux:

"Send this boy to his mother for corporal punishment."

The silence was deathly.

"Have you a mother, Colonel Toxé?" asked the Duke, in amiable tones.

Toxé's scarred face grew so hideously livid that for a second I gripped my sabre-hilt and ceased breathing.

With a good-humoured gesture and a shrug of dis-

dain the Duke signalled for our horses, and we mounted, our equipments jangling harshly through the stillness. His Highness wheeled his horse, deliberately turning his back on the regiment and it's colonel, and away we galloped amid a profound silence, broken only by the stroke of steel hoofs on the pebbled parade.

Our entrance had been dramatic, our exit theatrical. De Ruyter drove his gray charger up beside me and muttered:

"It was done like a king, or a fool—nobly. And God knows there is no nobility like a fool's."

"His contempt is royal," I answered; "his imprudence unsoldierly. If I wasn't a fool myself I'd resign."

"We're both fools," said old De Ruyter, with a sad smile, "so we'll hang on to the end." Then his face turned grayer and fiercer, and he struck the pommel of his saddle with open fist:

"I'd shoot every traitor if it meant annihilation to the whole army!" he muttered through his set teeth.

His Highness, galloping ahead, looked back, laughing.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WOLF-DRIVE

Describing an unwilling journey and an empty pageant, wherein the Countess loses a cup and a ring, and I defend a friend

As his Highness predicted, we had plenty of time for our wolf-drive, which, after all, did not amount to much, as it was to be confined to the extermination of the few marauding wolves which had penetrated the preserve.

Osborne, who joined us at the Luxembourg Railway Station, brought to our little party the only flicker of gaiety that had illumined the château for days. His cordial welcome by the Duchess and the Countess of Wilverwiltz revealed to me his popularity in Luxembourg, a fact I had not previously been aware of; and I told him so.

"Why," he said, "popularity is part of my profession!"

"Ugh—a politician!" I answered. "You're welcome to your popularity, Victor. It's no miracle you're loved."

"My son," he replied, cynically, "there are no miracles in politics; and politicians never love nor hate."

"Which appears to me contemptible," I said.

"Wrong, Gilbert; in politics and diplomacy nothing is contemptible. It's a dirty profession, created

to lawfully satisfy the natural vices of honourable men."

He was half in jest, half in earnest, but his banter annoyed me, especially as I noticed Bettina's undisguised preference for his society.

"Come with us, Mr. Osborne," she said, driving her dog-cart across the lawn to the bench where we sat; so Osborne picked up his gun-case and climbed to the back seat, laughing, and the Duke pretended to be very jealous of his intrusion, which made Bettina turn her head so far around that I could only see the tip of one reddening little ear.

"Rendezvous at the first carrefour!" called out the Duke, and away they went, followed by the Duchess, driving Prince Edric in a tilbury, escorted by two mounted piqueurs blazing with gold and green.

His Highness had understood that his young wife did not desire to go, and he was somewhat taken by surprise when, on our return from Luxembourg, he found that she had invited Edric to drive to the hunt with her. The Duchess, too, was surprised and annoyed when the two piqueurs galloped up as her escort, unsolicited; for this was an informal wolf-drive, and the piqueurs were not necessary. But she only smiled her thanks to his Highness and nodded brightly to the Grand Veneur, Raoul Lartigues, who swept the scalloped saddle-cloth with his gold cap, and bent his white head to his horse's mane.

"Are you not coming?" asked the Duchess, leaning from her seat and questioning me with clear sweet eyes.

"Mon Dieu, madame," I replied, embarrassed, "the

Countess of Wilverwiltz does not care to attend the drive."

"But I wish it!" said the Duchess, surprised and hurt. "Surely the Countess of Wilverwiltz can do this for me."

The Countess, who was standing on the other side of the tandem, opened her flame-coloured sunshade with a little snap that made the wheeler dance until the groom pulled him down.

"If you wish me to go," she said, "I should be very glad to; I merely thought the party was complete."

"Without Lieutenant Hardy!" exclaimed the Duchess.

"Oh," said the Countess, "I am so shockingly absent-minded to forget Monsieur Hardy!"

It was not very cleverly turned; it was unworthy of a clever woman. She knew it and hated me for it.

But I was tired of innuendoes and hidden conflicts, which not only wearied me but brought also a feeling of incipient contempt for us both; so I said:

"I do not think the Countess of Wilverwiltz forgot me; I think she does not care to drive with me."

The sincerity of my voice was unmistakable; the Duchess looked gravely at me; the Countess, taken by surprise, turned rosy from neck to forehead—unless it was the crimson light from her sunshade.

"That is absurd!" she murmured. "I will drive Monsieur Hardy very willingly to the hunt."

The Duchess brightened at once and flung her whip-lash out towards the leader; Edric waved his hand to me with an amused twinkle in his eyes; the grooms let go the horses' heads, and the tandem

swung out into the Wiltz road, leaving the Countess standing on the grass, facing me.

"If you do not care to go," I said, "it will not disappoint me in the least."

"Do you suppose I go to avoid disappointing you?" she asked.

"I know nothing about your reasons or your caprices," I answered. "I only know that I am not going to the wolf-drive—and I beg permission to take leave of the Countess of Wilverwiltz."

"Pardon," she interposed, icily; "it will be a subject of unpleasant comment if I do not drive you to the hunt."

"Unpleasant for you?"

"Yes."

"Then," I replied, smiling, "I accept your invitation to drive—without the slightest pleasure, I assure you."

The situation began to have its charms for me; I felt that I was fast losing any tenderness I might have had for the capricious young lady who stood there twirling her fire-tinted open sunshade and patting the turf impatiently with her pointed polished shoe-tips. What did I care if only I might be free from the slavery of a love that, after all, had never been anything to me but misery, mortification, and chagrin? Once able to contemplate that rounded yet slender figure in white muslin, once prepared to meet those dark-lashed eyes without emotion, what would I care for her hate?

I knew, moreover, that now there was a new ring of confidence in my voice, a ring long absent. I felt self-respect reviving, too, and with self-respect

came courage and the first faint emotion of independence.

"We'll make the drive as agreeable as possible," I said. "I shall not attempt conversation."

"I shall—if it should please me," she observed, stepping forward as the dog-cart was brought up under the trees.

A moment later, side by side, we were driving through the forest, a groom galloping discreetly in the rear.

"Oh," she said, with a soft little sigh, as we entered the Saint-Yssel road, "if you could only understand how I hate you."

"I do," I said, earnestly; "but I am beginning not to care."

"Not to care?" she repeated, looking around at me. "Oh, but you do care! And it's such a comfort to hate so deeply, so passionately, so constantly. I never before hated anybody; it is a new sensation—and so sweet, so delicious!"

"I know," I said, sympathetically. "I loved you, too, that way."

Her pretty underlip whitened between her white teeth; she launched a nervous cut of the whip at an overhanging bough; a shower of yellow leaves covered our shoulders and knees.

"Let us talk about hate," she said; "tell me about it! I never knew the pleasures of hatred before I met you!"

"It is something like love," I said, maliciously. "Hate, like love, is blind; the course of true hate never did run smooth.

"Pray proceed, monsieur," she said, looking very hard at the horses' ears, and I recited, solemnly:

"'But hate is blind and haters cannot see
The pretty follies that themselves commit.'"

"I think I must call you the proverbial pilgrim," she said, with heightened colour; "you are more tiresomely omniscient than your worst enemy could wish."

I was silent so long that she looked around again.

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked, disdainfully.

"Of eyes," I replied.

"You are strangely stupid," she observed, yet I saw she was curious, so I said nothing.

"Eyes?" she asked again, after the silence had displeased her long enough. I did not answer.

"What were you thinking about eyes?" she persisted, impatiently.

"About their language," I replied; "it could not interest you."

"It might," she said. "Please continue when I ask you."

So I said: "Blue eyes say: 'Love me or I die;' black eyes say: 'Love me or *you* die.'"

The next moment she cut the horse across his flanks, not very hard, and we flew forward into the carrefour, where already the others were assembled, and the under forester stood giving his last directions to the gun-bearers.

I aided the Countess Amyce to the square strip of turf; she thanked me and started to join the Duchess, but the Duke cried: "No! no! It's to be a ladies' drive for the cup! Choose your forester,

Lieutenant Hardy! Lartigues' horns will sound the death from the carrefour."

"Another hour together!" I said, looking mischievously at the Countess. "Can you stand it?"

"For the cup, yes. I am fond of winning prizes," she replied, serenely.

I chose the forester, Villon, and he promptly saluted the Countess, and brought her a dainty little rifle which looked like a toy beside my Winchester.

Then, bearing her rifle and his own — for I preferred always to carry my own guns—the big bushy-bearded forester set off, followed by the Countess and by me in single file.

"Health to the hunters!" cried the Duchess, passing with Edric and another forester, and the chasse-salute rang out merrily as each cavalier escorted his fair huntress to the particular runway assigned.

I saw the Duke turn and look after the Duchess, and there was something in that look that gave me hope for the future—if only the Duchess could have turned and seen it. But she did not; Edric was bending close to her shoulder. I heard her pretty, tired little laugh, mirthless and sad, and the Duke heard it too, and stood still, his serious young head lowered, hands clasped behind his back.

"Good-bye!" called Bettina to him, walking ahead with Osborne. His Highness raised his eyes, and motioned them to wait for him. So he lost his chance to go with his wife.

"What a fool is a man in love," I thought, never applying the axiom to myself.

"If you are ready, monsieur the proverbial pilgrim?" suggested the Countess Amyce, carelessly.

Our runway was not far from the carrefour, perhaps ten minutes' easy walk over the leaf-strewn springy path, then up a rocky gorge. The forester, Villon, walked ahead; there was just room for two abreast on the woodland path, so I stepped to the side of the Countess.

"Shall we speak of hate," I asked—"the hate that makes the world go round?"

She laughed and made a gesture towards the forester:

> "'Chasseur, je connais cette histoire;
> Je ne veux pas perdre mon temps—'"

she sang, in a deliciously sweet and childlike voice—a voice that had in it that golden, melodious grace-note peculiar to thrushes and children.

"Sing, then," I said, as she turned laughingly towards me.

"With pleasure—for my own pleasure," she said; "not for yours:

> "'Tant qu'on le pourra,
> L'on trinquera,
> Chantera,
> Aimera,
> La fillette
> Tant qu'on le pourra, larirette,
> On se damnera, larira!'"

And she sang that reckless, questionable chorus in the voice of an angel, and with an innocent simplicity that made an impossible verse exquisite and charming.

"Now you are shocked," she said, "and I don't care."

"You would if I were," I replied.

"No, I wouldn't!" she cried. "You may have what opinion you choose of me."

"Like the episode of the cat and the king," I suggested.

"Exactly. What does the king care how long the cat may stare?" And with a reckless little toss of her head she carolled on, careless, disdainful:

"'Dieu lui-même,
Ordonne qu'on aime
Je vous le dis en verité;
Sauvez-vous par la charité.'"

Ahead of us Villon, the forester, was standing still, unslinging the guns. The young Countess sprang to the mossy hillock beside him and knelt down, watching the slim cartridges follow each other into the magazine. After that it was a long, silent wait, sitting there, rifles on our knees, listening for the first crackle in the underbrush or the first faint halloo from the beaters. The Countess and I sat close together, our backs resting against the broad trunk of a dappled beech, our feet pointed towards the path below. Villon squatted on his haunches a dozen yards behind us.

"Je m'ennui," she said, frankly, after half an hour had passed in absolute silence.

"I also," I responded.

"You are not gallant to say so," she said, quickly.

"Have your enemies any virtues at all?" I asked.

"Some have intelligence, some are gay," she replied, smiling adorably.

"Well," said I, "one should beware of a laughing enemy. Are you on guard?"

"Garde à vous!" she replied, "et allez, monsieur!"

"No," I insisted; "you begin."

"Very well," she said, suddenly, and looking me unblushingly in the face, she asked me where the ring was.

"What ring?" I asked, giving ground.

"That is cowardly," she retorted. "I ask you for the ring I gave you in prison."

"Then first tell me where you found that ring," said I. "It was not yours to give, either."

"I know it," she said, surprised; "it was not my ring. I made a mistake in the dark there; I meant to give you this." And she held one hand up and lifted the delicate middle finger. On it was a turquoise and diamond ring.

"May I have it now?" I asked, with a sublime impudence that disarmed her quick anger.

"You almost deserve it—for teaching me the pleasures of hatred," she said. After a moment, half thoughtlessly, she began to turn it round and round on her white finger.

"I think I have earned it," I said, bending nearer.

There was a faint smile in the corners of her mouth; impulsively she drew the ring to the rosy tip of her finger, then looked at me.

"Do you want it?"

"Yes," said I, and quietly took it before she could resist.

Her first sentiment was anger—I saw it in her eyes. Surprise, renewed anger, and then amusement followed. I noted them all.

"When you have satisfied your curiosity—" she said, indifferently.

"When I have," said I, "the ring shall be returned to you."

"And, in the meanwhile, will you tell me what you have done with the other ring?"

"When you tell me where you found it," I replied.

"I don't know how you know the ring did not belong to me," she said, "but it did not; it was found by the Duke in the road near Van Tassel's lodge, nearly a year ago. The Duchess kept it in one of her jewel-boxes, and one day I put it on—the very day that I heard from Giroux that you, or, as I supposed, Prince Edric, had been held in prison for the Emperor's agents. I forgot I had it on—that is how you came to receive it."

"But," said I, "that ring does not belong to the Duchess either."

The Countess looked up at me in amazement.

"How do you know?" she said.

"Is it not true?" I persisted.

"Yes," she admitted; "the real owner of the ring has been discovered. Perhaps," she added, maliciously, "you know who it is?"

"Perhaps I do," I replied, cautiously.

"Well, then, it belongs to the little Queen of Holland," she said; "and did you know that, most wise one?"

"Oh no, it doesn't," said I, laughing.

"But it does," she persisted, opening her eyes wider. "Her Majesty sent out notices of the loss of the ring and offered all kinds of rewards. A description of the ring caught the Duke's eye while he was reading an old copy of *L'Indépendance Luxembourgeoise*. That is the reason I took the ring. I had ex-

pected to go to The Hague that same day, and I was very glad to think I could bring her Majesty the ring. When I left the prison I was—a—a little disturbed—and I forgot everything. Then came the diplomatic troubles anew, and his Excellency returned and the Duke decided we must all stay at Wilverwiltz. It was a long while before I could remember what I had done with the ring; I felt sure that I had not lost it. To-day it occurred to me that—that perhaps I had given it to you."

"You did," I said, quietly, "but I did not keep it."

"You did not keep it!" she repeated, in a voice that betrayed anxiety—and something else: a woman's hurt pride, a womanly resentment that was deliciously natural.

"If," said I, "that ring had been yours, I should have kept it—until you asked it again."

"How did you know it was not mine?"

"Because the rightful owner claimed it."

"Who?"

"Prince Edric."

"But, then, he must have given it to the Queen of Holland?"

"He never saw the Queen of Holland," I replied, laughing. "Her charming little Majesty is mistaken—or rather you mistake the ring."

"The description in the newspaper was exactly that of the ring I gave to you."

"Nevertheless," said I, "the Prince is not mistaken—for he lost it exactly where it was found."

That seemed to settle it; even the Countess laughingly admitted as much, wondering at the coincidence.

"And suppose it had been Prince Edric in prison,"

she said—"and suppose I had given him his own ring?"

We both laughed quietly, looking at each other without distrust—a new sensation for me, and one that I found very pleasant.

"Admit," I said, "that you found a great deal of amusement in the thought of impersonating the Duchess—"

"I didn't!" she cried, her cheeks hot and eyes bright.

"But everybody tells me you are exquisite in private theatricals," I continued, cruelly.

"If I acted a part—then—it was because I loved the Duchess well enough to risk it," she said.

"And the mischief of the thing didn't appeal to you?" I suggested.

She tried to look serious; she succeeded, after a fashion.

"Anyway," she said, "I distrusted Prince Edric—and I was right. He *did* come here for the Duchess's sake, and he *does* make love to her."

"Nonsense!" I said, sharply.

"He does—he is with her continually! And more, too—I don't trust him politically, and I have told the Duke."

"That," said I, "is the cruelest insult you could offer him. Do you imagine that he has any sympathy with the Emperor's aims—the Emperor who has sent agents to watch him—the Emperor who has refused his sanction to a marriage—"

"Dear me," she observed, with pity, "are you really stupid enough to credit that story of the beautiful peasant girl?"

"I not only credit it," I said, hotly, "but I affirm, on my honour, that it is true."

"And who told you ?"

"The Prince himself."

She laughed, mockingly. "If you trust him you will be as foolish as I once thought you. You are no diplomat, you are only a soldier, and a very innocent one at that. Suppose I should tell you that I have proof that Edric is here for political reasons. Suppose I should say that, in a week, I shall have absolute proof that his presence is a danger to the Duke, the dynasty, and the independence of Luxembourg ?"

"I should not believe it," I replied, simply.

"Very well," she retorted, "I shall have the proof; and when I do that man must leave."

"You seem to be very fond of exiling people," I observed. The next moment I was sorry; she flushed painfully; her hurt face was raised to mine with a look of reproach that I shall not forget.

"I love the Duchess and I love my country," she said. "A man who threatens the future of both I shall not spare."

"You will find out your mistake," I replied, gently; "you will also learn to discredit the lies of German spies. Don't look startled. I saw you talking to that villanous old creature, Vossburg, and to Wiepert, the other day. Don't you know they are spies, sent here to create a German sentiment—perhaps a revolution in favour of German intervention ?"

"Do you believe that ?" she asked, smiling calmly.

"I know it," I replied.

"Then you are once more in error," she said, scornfully. "Pray permit me the liberty of deciding some

things for myself, monsieur. And, by the way, my ring."

I put it on my watch-chain, fastened the clasp firmly, tested it, and looked at her. Her head was turned the other way. We said nothing for a full minute.

It was growing dimmer in the forest when, at last, we heard the distant hallooing of the beaters and the more distant rifle-shots, one, two, perhaps a dozen. But no wolf came our way, although the Countess raised her gun and eyed the *sentier* with determination written on every feature.

Then the soft chorus of hunting-horns broke out through the woods ; the drive had ended.

"Oh, dear," said the Countess, looking around at me, "we have lost the cup !"

"We have gained more than that," I said, moving lightly to her side as we entered the homeward trail.

We were very silent on our way.

"I think I am tired," said the Countess, resting her arm a brief second against my arm, as I aided her down the rocks.

So we began the descent.

CHAPTER XIX

HIS HIGHNESS SPEAKS

A chapter devoted to the generalities that treat of particulars, and especially of wisdom gained by experience

THE advent of Osborne had brought the first glimmer of gaiety to Wilverwiltz; everybody felt it and everybody, in the feverish desire to distract their thoughts from their own unhappiness, began to suggest all kinds of amusements.

There was a golf tournament, easily won by the Countess Amyce, who held up the great silver loving-cup, the first prize, and ironically invited me to drain it.

"Why not?" said I, taking it from her. "I have drained bitterer cups at your command."

Luckily for me it was nearly empty, else I should not have made my promise good, for the cup held quarts.

Edric, who had taken possession of the three wolf-heads, killed that day in the preserve, spent most of his time mounting them for the Duchess. She had shot two wolves under his guidance and she presented him with the cup she had won, an act as gracious as it was undiplomatic, considering the marked coolness between her husband and the Prince.

"What the devil has Athel against me?" he asked me more than once; and I could not convince him that the Duke suspected him.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "Any idiot can see there is nothing but good comradeship between the Duchess and me."

Any idiot could not see; but I was unable to make him understand that.

"I'm not going to offend and slight a dear little woman who is very kind to me," he said; "and Athel can go to the devil."

"He's going fast enough," said I; "he's drinking too much wine, and, worst of all, he drinks alone in his den. Drown sorrow in good company, and there's hope for you; but a solitary drinker is in sorry company."

"He's a brute to neglect his wife," was all Edric would answer; so I prudently desisted for the moment, wondering where the thing was going to end.

After the golf tournament the Duke took possession of Osborne and me, and we stood in coverts and banged at pheasants until I wished every bird was broiled and eaten and the coverts burned over. The first flight of woodcock gave us better sport, but I thought it somewhat selfish of the Duke to withdraw from the château and dampen any attempt at gaiety there. Perhaps he divined my thoughts, for he said one day:

"It's either this sort of thing or drinking myself stupid in my gun-room—and you know it."

"Your unhappiness is of your own making," I said, bluntly.

He wheeled about as though he meant to strike me; it was a narrow escape for one of us, for my patience with him had nearly ended, and he meant murder for a moment.

He sat down on a log, very pale, and rested his handsome face on his closed hand. I pitied him, but I had said all I could say, considering his abnormal sensitiveness.

We walked back, chatting as though nothing had happened; but he was drunk that night—drunk, all alone in his gun-room, where I found him lying white and stupid in his chair; and I sat there with him until morning.

A day or two later, the season at Scheveningen being ended, the Duchess threw open the house at Wilverwiltz, and there began a series of gaieties that made the little court quite brilliant. His Excellency came down from Luxembourg, trailing in his wake the callow *personnel* of the Legation; Colonel Toxé, Major Latrille, and the Duke's treasurer, Baron d'Arlon, also arrived, reinforced by a dozen harmless little counts and countesses and barons and baronesses who had played all summer in the salt water of Scheveningen like well-conducted shrimps, and were now most amiable and pink-and-white, and very Luxembourgeois, with the Luxem sometimes left out.

"I guess," observed his Excellency, drawing me into a corner during an intricate and much beribboned figure in a cotillon, led by Osborne and the Duchess—"I guess, Hardy, that the sooner these children are taken care of by the Sudden One the better it will be for 'em. But that ain't what our government thinks, and we've got to look out for the Dook, or the Sudden One will catch him asleep."

"I wish to Heaven," said I, "that I could begin reorganising the army. Now is the time, if it's going to be done."

"Can't help it," replied his Excellency. "Our government says wait until Germany gets into better temper, so I guess we'll have to wait."

That night I had a long conversation with his Highness and his Excellency concerning the reported disaffection of the army. The Duke treated the whole matter contemptuously, declaring that Giroux and his gendarmerie were enough to frighten the army into a collective fit.

"Still," I said, "if there should be a riot—even disturbance enough to give Germany a pretext for intervention — the chestnuts would be in the fire, and I don't think the United States would pull them out for your Highness."

"I'm damn sure of that," said his Excellency, bluntly.

The Duke laughed very heartily, assuring us that the half-dozen disaffected soldiers in the army had been too thoroughly frightened to continue plotting—even if they had ever plotted.

"Don't be too sure," said his Excellency, mildly; "still waters run deep and stagnant pools collect poison; and, God knows, your army, Dook, is the most stagnant collection in Europe."

"It is—but it won't be as soon as we begin reorganisation," said the Duke, hopefully. "Universal service and new blood will do wonders for Luxembourg."

That was always the way such councils of state ended. The Duke absolutely refused to see any danger in the constant rumours of discontent fomented by German agents. He laughed at the idea of personal danger; he said he would do anything to insure the security of the country and its indepen-

dence; but, he argued, nothing further could be done until the United States persuaded Germany that there was no reason why the Luxembourg army should not be reorganised and increased.

As for Toxé and Latrille, his Highness, if he suspected them, did not show it, nor did he acknowledge it to me. I have often thought that the idea of his officers betraying him mortified him so much that, if he did not entirely discredit the possibility, at least he was too sensitive and proud to admit it to foreigners.

He was a very brave, very lovable, very illogical, and very unhappy young man.

Meanwhile, Osborne was having a glorious time; so was Bettina, except when the Duchess told her gently and sweetly that she was dancing too much with Osborne. That made her unhappy for nearly an hour, during which she walked all around the park wall with Flic, who nearly caught the grasshoppers which Bettina's little feet startled into a click-clicking flight across the clover.

Nevertheless, that evening she danced with Osborne until her cheeks flamed and her eyes sparkled, and she felt that it would be no very difficult performance to drift into paradise on the arm of this cool, laughing-eyed young American.

As it was my fate to conscientiously attempt to manage everybody's affairs except my own, I spoke to Osborne about Bettina, and felt like a prig for doing it.

"My son," said Victor, kindly, "go to the deuce!"

"You're a selfish brute," I replied; "anybody can see you have turned her head."

"Well," he said, "if it were true, I am not married, am I?"

"No, and you won't be to Bettina, if the Duchess has a head on her shoulders," I replied, "or if I have."

"Is there any reason for saying such a thing to me?" he inquired, suddenly savage.

"You put the words and the reason into my mouth," I rejoined, "when you said: 'Politicians never love or hate.'"

"Rubbish!" he retorted, reddening; "if you believe everything I tell you—"

"I don't, Victor. Only don't be selfish in your amusement."

He went away, looking very sober, but I saw him later in the evening leading Bettina blissfully through the mazes of one of those devilishly seductive Spanish waltzes.

As for me, I had not danced at all since the series of cotillons had begun at Wilverwiltz. Not that I could not; every boy at West Point is obliged to learn. But after the first formal figure with the Duchess, his Highness usually withdrew to the terrace, and I of course attended him, being in full uniform and acting as aide-de-camp.

Once he said: "You know I don't mind if you care to dance; I would enjoy my cigar the more for watching you."

So one evening, after examining the dancers who passed the great windows in whirls of silk and lace and fluttering ribbons, I told his Highness I wouldn't mind dancing, and he laughed his youthful, kindly laugh, and told me to pitch in.

We stood a moment together, watching his Excellency proudly footing it with the Duchess; we ob-

served Toxé and Latrille prancing about with two shell-pink baronesses; we applauded old De Ruyter, who turned stiffly round and round, his rigid arm encircling Bettina's little waist. Edric was dancing with Amyce; I watched them until he led her to a seat, then, pulling on my gloves, I sauntered into the ball-room and looked about for somebody to take pity on me.

Bettina did at once, bless her little heart, and we whirled away, to the intense disgust of Osborne, who had been mustering up his courage to ask Bettina for a third time in spite of the discouraging attitude of the Duchess.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bettina, breathless, "I didn't believe you knew how to dance—you never came on the floor, you know."

"I'll come oftener now," said I, leading her to the Duchess, which manœuvre almost cost me Osborne's friendship.

"Imbecile!" he muttered in my ear. "It's the very thing I've tried to avoid; the Duchess knows we've danced twice. Go back and ask her Highness for this waltz."

I was contemplating a move in the direction of Amyce de Wiltz; however, I did as he wished, and the Duchess prettily consented in that delightfully informal manner peculiar to the court of Luxembourg.

After that, at her Highness's request, I danced with several delicately tinted baronesses, all resembling each other, all monotonously pretty and frivolous.

As I was strolling towards the conservatory to rejoin his Highness, rather dissatisfied with my terpsichorean essays, I encountered the Countess of Wilverwiltz on

Osborne's arm, and I bowed pleasantly and passed them, with a little tightening of the heart.

Now, whatever it was that made me stop and look back I do not know. It seemed as though a still voice had spoken my name, close to my ear, yet I scarcely expected it to be true. Nevertheless, on the impulse I turned, and saw the Countess looking back at me. We both stopped; I retraced my steps and came to where she stood, still holding Osborne's arm.

"I don't understand how you could have heard me speak," she said, a trifle disconcerted; "the music and chatter drown everything, and I scarcely whispered your name."

"A beautiful woman's whisper can be heard farther than a shout from the pulpit," I replied.

She turned to Osborne and released his arm with a smile. Presently I found myself with the Countess Amyce, floating in the dreamiest of waltzes, oblivious of everything except the soft light from the candles, the softer music, and the woman in my arms. Everything else had vanished, the people, the gilded walls, the polished floor itself. Even the light grew dimmer and softer, the music died away, pulsating, as our two hearts throbbed, noiselessly; then seemed to cease.

We stood still; my arm fell from her waist; the harmony of voices around us grew and swelled out as consciousness returned. I saw Bettina passing with Osborne and her Highness; I saw Edric follow them into a flare of light where glasses tinkled and flagons flashed a million prismatic sparks through amber wines and wines as crimson as the moist, half-parted lips that smiled, answering my low-voiced thanks.

"No, let us go to the terrace," she said. "To-night I neither hate nor love, nor have I any human desire. It may never be so again; let us stand there a moment in the moonlight—and let us remember this waltz together."

His Highness, sitting with cigar unlighted, smiled at us as we passed. I saw his pale handsome face bent on his breast where the broad orange sash swept over his uniform, studded with jewelled orders.

We bowed low; he rose and watched us to the terrace, then turned away alone.

In the moonlight a white peacock, moving across the lawn, cast a pale shadow that dimmed the dewy diamonds strung on every grass-blade. Presently the ghostlike bird flapped to the parapet, folded its snowy wings and settled down, its slender neck sunk in its breast.

"Something has disturbed it," I said, thinking of the stoats and foxes that roamed everywhere through the country; "there is some intruder near."

She did not answer; she leaned on the marble balustrade, her slender hands clasped beside her face, eyes dreaming.

After a long while I spoke again:

"Has hate faded forever—or will the morning bring it back, stronger than ever?"

"Morning?" she repeated. "What do I know what the morning may bring?"

"Perhaps nothing more than a memory of our dance," I said.

"Ah, that dance!"

"Our first."

"Yes, our first."

"'YOU FOOLS,' HE SAID, 'TO PLAY WITH THE LOVE GOD SENDS YOU'"

Then the spell that was upon her seemed to break; she looked up at me with dark mischievous eyes and strove to read me. It was easy enough, God wot.

"I suppose," she said, "you are tiring of my hatred?"

"I can stand this kind," I smiled.

"Oh, I know I am much too kind to you," she went on, resentfully; "it's only because I myself tire of such passionate hate—not because I care what you may feel."

"You certainly encourage me by having any feeling at all towards me," I said.

"I don't mean to encourage you; if I thought indifference would hurt you I'd be indifferent."

"It would," said I; "but you can't be."

"I can," she flashed out, rising from her position on the parapet; "and I beg you will return me my ring."

"I won't," I replied, serenely.

"Give it to me at once," she said, in a low voice.

I wore it on a chain in my left breast-pocket, and I drew it out and began to undo the swivel clasp that held it.

"Here it is," said I, holding it up in the moonlight.

Then a painful thing occurred: his Highness, vague-eyed, pale, stepped out of the glass door behind us, and at the first glance I saw he had been drinking heavily.

Confounded, ashamed, I moved forward impulsively, but he motioned me back with a gesture:

"You fools," he said—"you fools, to hurt each other with unkind words!"

In the deathly silence I heard Amyce gasp.

"You fools," he said, bitterly, "to play with the love God sends you !"

He stood, slightly swaying, his pallid face and blood-shot eyes fixed on us. Then he went away, groping as though blinded, and I followed him to the turret-door, but he waved me back.

"Take me in—if you please," said the Countess Amyce, in a still, small voice; "and—keep the ring—until I ask it."

I led her to the ball-room; the Duchess signalled her, and Bettina rose and came towards us.

"Leave me now," she said, her dark eyes shining with tears; "and if you can do anything for his Highness—"

"What he has done for us," I said, "I shall try to do for him—and his wife."

"Yes," she whispered, "what he has done for—us; try—for her Highness's sake. She loves him."

CHAPTER XX

MASKS

Showing how one cook might spoil the broth, especially considering the fact that he can neither cook for others nor prepare a palatable dish for his own consumption

MEANTIME events were so shaping themselves in the United States that it really seemed as if the triple Samoan guardianship might be violently ruptured and a single protectorate over the islands proclaimed by Germany in the teeth of England and the United States.

"If that's the way the cat jumps," said his Excellency to me one morning, "Luxembourg will be safe for a while anyway; and it might not be a bad thing if we know how to use it."

"You mean Cuba and Hawaii?" I asked.

"I do, young man, and so does the President. But he is not popular; he is too honest to be popular. But I guess we ain't going to fight about anything anyway, and the cat can jump whichever way she damn pleases."

"At present she has jumped onto the back fence," I said, smiling.

"Yes," said his Excellency, "the cat's on the fence and the nigger's in the wood-pile, and William the Sudden is sawing wood. I guess I'll hold a pow-wow with the Dook." And he walked away towards the

golf-links, where his Highness was driving off the tee.

It was quite certain that we were approaching one of those social and political anomalies known as "crises." Even I, lacking in diplomatic intuition as I was, could intelligently watch and even forestall, at times, the moves on the strategical chess-board, where the pieces were live kings and queens, and the pawns real armies.

Already the autumn manœuvres of the German army had begun, and, of course, quite by accident, the theatre of operations was Rhenish Prussia. Nobody could protest because eighty thousand men were massing within a few hours' march of Luxembourg, because they were on their side of the frontier. That was a move of William the Sudden to develop his pawns.

The answer to that move was also a pawn-play, made by the little Queen of Holland, and so quickly that the Sudden One nearly lost his royal temper—which is unwise in chess. The answering move was this: the Dutch manœuvres, which usually take place in October, were advanced a whole month earlier; two stolid Dutch army-corps, numbering perhaps fifty thousand men, were set in motion along that newly acquired strip of territory which enables Holland to pierce Belgium near Saint-Imbert and touch the independent Grand Duchy of Luxembourg at the frontier hamlet of Sfax.

The next move in the game was more serious: William the Sudden himself arrived at Trèves, on the Moselle. In chess it would have been called a movement of royalty to support pawns. But the answer to

that threw the Sudden One entirely out of all his calculations; for little Queen Wilhelmina, apparently possessed with a sudden thirst for military information, decided to watch the Dutch manœuvres in person, and was received at Hautes Fanges with frantic cheers by the entire Dutch army.

"She'll come to Wilverwiltz before long, mark my words," said his Excellency; "and if she does it at the proper moment she'll have all Europe with her."

These political preparations for a play that fate might make into farce or tragedy scarcely created an additional ripple on the surface of the gay whirl at Wilverwiltz. The very people who had most to lose or gain by a shake of war's iron dice paid the least heed to the ominous sounds behind the curtain. Yet I for one would have given much and dared much to find out what the scene-shifters had prepared for us behind that cloaked curtain, diplomacy.

Even at Wilverwiltz events had occurred past my comprehension; the Countess of Wilverwiltz, since that evening on the terrace, never for a single second gave me a chance to see her alone. Not that she avoided me; but she always managed to have somebody else with her when I approached. Yet she received me now very graciously and sweetly, and with that faint trace of embarrassment which sets a man's heart quickening and nerves him to play that greatest of life's games—a game that none can play for him, a game where none can aid him, save his adversary; the only game where, when the woman loses, both win, and when the man loses, all is lost. I think it is called "hearts," or something similar.

But there were other matters concerning the Countess Amyce which occupied and troubled me: her increasing aversion to Edric and her mysterious solitary horseback gallops into the Wiltz coppice, where, I began to fear, she was listening to more absurd lies from Wiepert and Vossburg touching on Edric's alleged intrigue against the Duke.

The worst of it was that she had evidently told the Duke of her suspicions; and his Highness, who already bitterly resented Edric's imprudent attentions to the Duchess, now took no care to conceal his dislike of the Prince.

If I could have laid my hand on Wiepert or Vossburg I should have taken it upon myself to expel them from the country—quietly, of course.

Once or twice I hunted for them, taking Giroux and a dozen of his gendarmes with me, but we found no traces of them, and Giroux narrowly escaped falling into a steel wolf-trap, concealed in a patch of ferns.

"Sapristi!" he blurted out, perspiring from sheer fright; "you had better tell his Highness to take up his traps now that he's shot all the wolves in the preserve."

But wolf-traps were not the only thing to be dreaded in the forest. One morning, while on my way to breakfast with Edric, somebody fired a rifle, and the bullet jerked my hat from my head. It may have been an accident; they happen even in Luxembourg. But the curious part of it was that I caught a glimpse of Vossburg's bloated face through the hedge, and I tore the clothes nearly off my back to get through the hedge and compare notes with him on the coincidence.

I suppose he became tired of waiting for me to get through. However, I told nobody.

That night, at the château, they gave Coppée's exquisite one-act comedy of "Le Passant." Amyce was Sylvia; Osborne, Le Passant. And, oh Heavens! how I did hate him.

Then followed a little farce by Labiche, called "Frisette," in which Amyce made an adorable Frisette, the Duchess a very sweet and uninteresting Madame Ménachet, and Osborne a first-rate Gaudrion. The Voice of Monsieur Barbaroux was taken by Toxé—very unpleasantly.

It was then that I realised more fully than I had after the performance in my prison the delicious histrionic cleverness of the young Countess of Wilverwiltz. In that eighth scene she was simply exquisite:

GAUDRION (*à part*)—"Hum! Hum!"
FRISETTE (*accroupie près de la cheminée, à part*)—"Tousse, va! . . . si tu crois que je vais te répondre . . . "

After "Frisette," his Highness seriously performed a judicious violin obbligato, much applauded and very, very bad. His Highness loved music as he loved his hounds, and he treated both with firmness and severity, for their good.

A delicately tinted pink-and-white baroness sang "Viens, zoué dans mon zardin!" and Osborne followed with a cleverly expurgated edition of "Barney Riley" on the banjo, which set everybody's marching blood tingling. He capped the climax with dear old "Garryowen," beloved by the Seventh Cavalry; and the evening ended with a bit from Lovelace, said in English by Amyce:

. . . "As when on blazing wings a blest man soars
And, having past to God through fiery doors,
Straight 's robed with flames, when the same element
Which was his shame, proves now his ornament" . . .

She turned the least bit as she stepped back through the crimson curtains and looked at me with fathomless velvet eyes. But, when everybody had thronged to the ball-room, and the Duke's orchestra were fiddling madly in their rococo heaven, I found her, only to lose her the same instant, as she whirled away in a waltz with Toxé.

In vain I prowled, waiting my turn; in vain I sulked; in vain I glared that gloomy, unconscious glare which once amused me in other unfortunate young men.

Bettina and Osborne were doing two-steps all over the floor, to the intense annoyance of De Ruyter, who was slowly and methodically turning the Duchess, pivot-wise, with a subdued yet earnest enthusiasm that made me fear he'd twist her Highness's pretty head off. Even his Excellency, tucking his partner's right arm into his own hip, as though adjusting a sword, footed it up and down in an antiquated waltz-step, to the polite amazement of his partner, a cream-and-strawberry baroness.

The Duke, watching them through the conservatory, signalled me to join him in a cigar, which I did, mentally cursing Toxé and anybody else who interfered with me.

"You're not dancing?" he asked, pleasantly.

"No, your Highness."

"Tired?"

"No—only of inaction."

"There's time for action when we change our laws

and set all our good peasant-folk marching behind the bass-drum."

"A tumble down-stairs saves many a soul from the devil," I said; "there's a time for all things." . . .

"There is time. Armies are more easily mended than men's hearts."

I looked up at his sober young face, already lined under the eyes, and, close to either corner of his mouth, I saw new marks, those thin, almost imperceptible, threadlike lines of pain, not always physical.

"Men's hearts," I said, "are never out of their own keeping, public opinion to the contrary. With women it is different."

"Men seldom choose to claim possession of their own hearts, however," he replied, vaguely.

"That is also true, your Highness—even when their hearts are tossed back at their own feet."

After a silence he said, without the least emotion and with a sincerity that touched me: "I wish I were dead, Hardy." He laid one hand lightly on my elbow; it was perfectly steady.

"You might better be—if this is all of life that life holds for you," I said; "but it isn't."

"What else is there?" he asked.

"The love of your wife," I replied, wondering whether he would knock me down. If he had, I should have given him a lively quarter of an hour; I felt in that humour.

His hand on my elbow tightened slowly but steadily; his grip was vicelike, with all the quality of metal in it.

"Damn you!" he said. "Do you know what you say?"

"Exactly," I replied; "let go of my arm!"

He dropped my arm; we looked into each other's eyes with perfect candour. After a moment he turned and walked out to the terrace where acres of potted flowers perfumed the still clear air with a fresher, fainter fragrance for the tinge of frost in every breath.

I followed, lifting and hooking my sabre so it could not clash against the metal on the violet sabre-tache.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I am in your Highness's uniform, and I forgot what was due to my superior officer."

"Hardy! Hardy!" he said, almost fiercely, turning a ghastly face to mine, "what do I care for that—or your rank or your uniform, or your tinsel sabre-tache! I need a friend—I need a man—a comrade who can tell me what you have told me—who can make me believe it—who can put some strength and courage and simple manliness into me. God knows it's time!"

I waited; for this was the moment for silence.

"I can't speak—I can't say what you know I would say," he went on, feverishly. "There's something that chokes me, that almost strangles me when I try to ask for help—even from God. Shame, pride, and that curse of my life, my own cowardly, timid distrust in my own miserable self—all this and everything that I am—my every instinct, my inherited weakness, my indecision, and above all, my shame—have made life such a hell for me that I would not live one second—now!—if I were not too proud to leave the world that way."

I said: "Your Highness's courage is unquestioned; the intelligence of your Highness leaves much to be desired. None so blind as he who will not open

his eyes, except he who sees and says, 'O God, interpret for Thy servant!'"

He leaned heavily on both elbows, head buried in his hands. I saw his sabre, high on his thigh, begin to swing gently to and fro, silvered by the moonlight.

"If he can weep," I thought, "he can see and hear."

I said, again, leaning on the marble balustrade beside him:

"Prince or no prince, you are a man. If what you seek is worth seeking, are you afraid to dare?"

"Yes, I am afraid. She knows—she knows what I am. She knows I am not a man—only a Prince, to be sold and bartered. She inherited me when she inherited the country—like a bit of gilt plate, like the quarterings on the crest there in the palace. Oh, the sorry trade!—a young life for the tarnished heraldry of a crest!—a woman's whole long life for a name and a palace, and the shadow of a man to haunt her till her eyes close at last and shut him out forever. Is it not horrible, Hardy—by God!—is it not horrible?"

He began to pace the terrace, his straight, shining sword by his side quivering in the moonbeams, the medals on his breast making mellow, golden music.

"Who are you, anyway, to question me?" he cried, wheeling about suddenly.

"Your officer and comrade—who would rather see you this way than lying drunk in your gun-room," I said, sharply.

He burst into a harsh, mocking laugh:

"Discipline in the army is wonderful when the commander weeps on his aide-de-camp's shoulder!"

The next moment he stepped up swiftly and took my hand and held it tightly. "Forgive me, Hardy, I think I'm half crazy to-night. You've been very decent to me—good-night."

He lingered, looking curiously at me with what I thought was a happier expression on his worn young face than I had seen for many a day.

"There is only one man her Highness loves," I said, risking all or nothing.

He suddenly turned a deep crimson, standing there as awkward as a youth at his first tryst; and I almost laughed as I watched the colour dye his face to the neck. Then he went away, noiselessly, and his step was lighter than a lover's; and his head was bent a little, so that I saw his eyes, as he passed, dreaming of what a man might dare for love. But what one dreams at night takes strange forms and fears by day, and I knew that the time was not yet come when his Highness would find courage to woo his wife for the love he bore her.

I walked leisurely back to the ball-room, where the Duchess had already given the signal for breaking up, and now stood with the Countess Amyce, patiently listening to Bettina's appeal for "one more waltz."

"Then I'll dance it with you myself," said the young Duchess, mischievously, and before Bettina could even pout, she found herself swung off into a delirious Spanish waltz, without the slightest chance of catching Osborne's indignant eye and soothing his disappointment with a *moue* of resignation.

This manœuvre, for the first time in days, left me alone a moment with the Countess Amyce; and before she had a chance to move closer to the group of ala-

baster baronesses behind her, I asked for this last waltz.

"It will take you so long to unhook your sabre and sabre-tache," she said, moving a single step backward.

"Then I'll dance as I am."

"Merci—and my gown ?"

"But—"

"No, no, the waltz is nearly ended. See, the musicians are yawning up to heaven."

She took another little backward step, looking up at me from under her curled lashes, defiant, mischievous, yet with something in the curve of her red lips that softened the harshness of my disappointment.

"Why do you avoid me ?" I asked, bluntly.

"I ? Avoid you, Monsieur Hardy ?"

"Yes. Why ?"

"Dear me, what an absurd question !"

"Absurd or not, tell me. Why ?"

"How can a woman tell what she does anything for ?" she said. "You can't buy reasons, like raisins, at Frivolity Fair. Good-night, monsieur the proverbial pilgrim."

To my chagrin the music ceased ; the Duchess and Bettina, flushed and breathless, came up from their romp, and De Ruyter attended them to the great staircase. There I also took my leave of her Highness, who impulsively stretched out her jewelled hand, standing on the first step ; and I bent and touched it gravely with my lips.

"What shall we do without our aide-de-camp ?" she said, with her pretty, serious smile.

"What shall we do with him ?" murmured the Countess, leaning on the balustrade.

Bettina laughed, and tossed a bunch of white violets down at me, which flattered me greatly until I noticed Osborne behind me. It is difficult sometimes to tell when a woman is looking at the man behind you—and I am a modest man, too.

In the conservatory half a dozen officers sat smoking and sipping their fiery Eau-de-vie-de-Wiltz, a species of rose-wine, unfavourable to sobriety and silence.

"Don't touch it," said Osborne, as I sat down beside De Ruyter, who, alone of all the company, stuck to his Holland schnapps.

Latrille and Toxé, in full uniform, looked up sneeringly as Osborne and I ordered a couple of glasses of Diekirch beer, the finest beer in the world, not excepting the most famous brews of Munich and Pilsen.

"You are right," observed old De Ruyter; "rose-wine and wagging tongues set church bells tolling for a fool's requiem."

"Go on with your story," said Toxé to Latrille; and that weak-faced young man began one of those scandalous histories that seem inevitable when moral gentlemen prepare to part for the night.

The story was weaker and more vicious than the teller; Toxé laughed; Giroux grinned, and two very young officers slapped their knees and looked wisely convulsed.

"Really," said I, to Latrille; "you tell the story so well it is a pity it is not worth telling."

Latrille looked at me, confused; Toxé said, with a covert sneer:

"Even an American could scarcely call the story immoral."

"No," I said; "but if the story were as bad as the way it was told, I think even a German might have been shocked; don't you?"

Then a very young officer began a discourse to prove that men were vastly more moral than women, but Osborne said: "Les hommes veulent trouver chez leurs femmes assez de vertu pour pouvoir s'en passer," and everybody laughed.

"I think," said Toxé, turning his evil, pitted face to me, "that a woman would rather a man ruffled her modesty than rumpled her gown."

I said: "You have doubtless been in positions to judge the effects of both."

"Gentlemen!" said De Ruyter, coldly.

Osborne, resting his arm on mine, finished his beer and stood up.

"Come, Gilbert," he said, "there's a hunt on to-morrow, you know."

"A gentleman can always find nobler game," said Toxé, distinctly.

"You are very hard on the *wild* pigs," I said, looking at him closely.

He turned pasty with fury and pushed back his chair, but old De Ruyter struck the table with clenched fist, upsetting and shivering glasses and decanters.

"Nom de Dieu, assez!" he roared. "Who dares follow a quarrel under his Highness's roof and in the presence of his Highness's adjutant? Colonel Toxé, sit down!"

Toxé did not move.

"Sit down!" repeated De Ruyter, with a terrible light in his near-sighted eyes.

Toxé sat down.

"Monsieur," said De Ruyter, turning to me, "your attitude, as his Highness's aide-de-camp, is neither dignified nor wise. I beg you to withdraw your offensive expression—offensive to every man at this table."

I bowed instantly to the old man, reddening at his reproof.

"I had no intention of offending any *gentleman* present," I said; "and if I have, it will give me the greatest pleasure to offer any satisfaction—"

"Silence!" cried De Ruyter. "That is not what I meant."

"Oh," I laughed, "it was merely a general compliment to you all."

"Come, come," muttered De Ruyter, trying not to smile.

So I frankly told them I was sorry their susceptibilities had been injured, and I agreed with De Ruyter that this was not the place to discuss differences.

"Nor anywhere else," he said, roughly.

I looked directly at Toxé, then smiled and waited.

Toxé, at De Ruyter's command, withdrew his covert offer and threat, and apologised to the company with lips that trembled and scarcely bottled up a rage that creased his ugly white face till every pitted mark stared out distinct and horrible.

Then I went away with Osborne, who sniffed and made ironical comments on my diplomatic tact, assuring me that when the Duke heard of it he'd pack me home, and his Excellency would hurl his curse and my valise after me. Which proved partly true; for next morning his Highness sent for me and for Toxé,

and between him and his Excellency I never in all my life had such a verbal drubbing.

Toxé and I shook hands, a painful operation for us both; and an hour later, humiliated and ashamed, I went to my room to dress for the first official boar-hunt of the season.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GAME AFOOT!

Wherein, through a brave man's death, I find it necessary to ride for a brave man's life

When Raoul Lartigues' green and gold huntsmen sounded the "Tryst" under the forest trees by the first carrefour, the sweet minor music of the swelling horns summoned to the rendezvous two young people who for ten minutes had sat on their horses a little apart from the others.

They walked their horses, now, slowly towards the carrefour, where eager piqueurs surrounded his Highness, and the grave Grand Veneur, whip in hand, watched the uncoupling of the great amber-eyed boarhounds.

"I cannot promise," said the Countess Amyce, lowering her voice as we approached the others. "I wish you would give me back my ring."

"Then promise me one moment on the terrace," I whispered.

"Will you give me the ring ?"

"Will you promise ?"

"Merci ! what a man to ask questions. No, I won't promise—now."

"When ?"

"Never—perhaps."

"Draw bridle, for Heaven's sake!" I begged. "We are close to them."

She looked at me, frowned slightly, and drew bridle.

"They are casting off," she said. "Hurry; what must I promise you—for my peace of mind?"

"A moment alone with you to-night on the terrace."

"Would the garden do?" she asked, innocently. Then something in my face seemed to intimidate her, and she lowered her dark eyes and sat there silently in her saddle, twisting the bridle with idle fingers.

"Then—I shall wait until to-night," I said, scarcely controlling my voice.

"Wait—for what? All moments resemble each other. Do you fear to say what you wish in daylight?"

"No," I said, with a quick, breathless resolve. "I asked you for a moment alone because I love you—and I wished to tell you so."

I leaned from my saddle a little nearer.

"I love you, Amyce! Will you be my wife?"

The wind blew a silken curling strand of hair across her cheek; under it the colour deepened and deepened.

I waited for a movement, a word; I distinguished nothing around me—the forest, the leaping hounds, the huntsmen vanished. I only saw that dainty figure beside me, in the saddle, the idle hands twisting the bridle, the bent head and lowered lashes.

Suddenly the whole forest rang with "Game afoot!" from the clanging horns; there was a rustle, a crash, a rush of pounding hoofs, and the hounds gave tongue.

The Countess sat straight up in her saddle, tore one gantlet from her white hand, and held it out to me.

"Wear it!" she whispered, with flaming cheeks; and the next moment her horse bounded forward amid the scurry and crackle of scattering hounds and huntsmen.

Wear it! Confused, dizzy with my great happiness, I drew the little glove through the breast of my hunting-coat, then flung out my bridle and tore after the hounds. I saw nothing; leaves swept my face as I flew on, trees, saplings, thickets faded like phantoms. I heard nothing save the echo of her voice in my ears, yet the horns were harshly ringing out a "View-halloo!" and the full-chested baying of the hounds struck through musically. It was due to my horse that my brains were not dashed out against the trees; I scarcely touched the bridle at all. Twice I jumped water, and once floundered in a marsh. The country was break-neck, and atrocious; I passed Toxé, furious, caged in an abatis of dead-falls; I saw Giroux, unhorsed, chasing his mount piteously, aided by his Excellency, who had apparently had enough.

Osborne, Bettina, and the Duchess came galloping down a marshy *sentier*, close to the ragged tail of the pack; but the Duke and De Ruyter had been thrown out, and I saw them signal to the Duchess to cross diagonally the wooded incline to the right.

For a moment I had a full view of the chase, piqueurs galloping, hounds wheeling into the eastern woods; and I saw Amyce turn her head and look across at me.

The next ten minutes was a pace to kill; one by one the huntsmen dropped out or came to grief. De Ruyter was penned in and finally lost among the

swamp alders; Bettina and Osborne seemed to be lost too, although I couldn't see what prevented them from cutting across where I did. I caught a glimpse of the Duchess pulling up her horse and the Duke dismounting to examine the animal's fetlock. One after another I met wandering huntsmen, searching for the trail or listening vainly for the signalling horns that grew fainter and fainter. Still I rode on, trusting to that star that sometimes rises when a man makes it rise, and at last I stumbled into the bulk of the pack, running swiftly and silently, tongues lolling and thick with dust and froth. After them pounded Latrille, all alone; and when he saw me he set his horn to his mouth and sounded a beautiful "View-halloo!" but I saw nothing of the boar and answered it with "Game afoot!" blown fairly well for an amateur.

All at once there came an infernal uproar from the hounds, a rush of a heavy body through the underbrush, and Latrille drew bridle and sounded his horn until the echoes clashed back the stirring call, "At bay!"

And now I saw the boar—a great silvery-gray beast, quick as a panther, red-eyed, covered with froth, and every bristle on end.

His long, sharp, furry muzzle, armed with dazzling curved tusks, worked and wrinkled back as hound after hound ran up, splitting the air with hysterical yelps. Already two young dogs lay dead under his black and gray bulk; he planted his pointed, polished hoofs in the moss and hurled another hound headlong through the briers.

Latrille dismounted and drew his boar-knife, but I shouted to him to wait until the hounds had some

hold. He paid no attention to me; in truth there was scarcely time, for the boar charged him without hesitation, and the next moment there was a confused whirlwind of dogs, boar, and Latrille which sent me to the ground in a hurry, boar-knife drawn.

When the boar saw me he turned and charged me, but by that time the pack had a hold that told heavily, and I saw them drag the furious creature down into a hollow, fighting, snarling, and howling.

I ran to Latrille, but he was past all aid. However, I lifted his head and laid him against a tree, and at that moment Toxé galloped up to where I stood.

"Dismount," I said. "The dogs are holding the boar, but if he charges I don't think I can save Latrille."

To my amazement Toxé turned quite pale, and looked at Latrille with a sickly, fixed grin that made me furious.

"He's dead—isn't he ?" stammered Toxé.

"He's dying," I said. "Get off your horse, quick !"

Then the boar shook off the hounds in the gully, and rose, swinging right and left with bloody tusks, and the next moment Toxé wheeled his horse and galloped away in mad flight.

Stunned by his incredible cowardice, I could not even find my voice to bid him stay his shameful flight, and perhaps it was well that I did not, for at the sound of my voice the boar might have charged me again, and what would have become of the dying man or of me either is a matter I seldom speculate on.

The boar stood a moment, reeking with foam, covered with leaves and sticks; the hounds howled in a circle, noses pointed heavenward. The boar was a

"gray-boar," an old devil incarnate, and perhaps a match for such young dogs, even reinforced as they were by two of the old couples.

"Take off my coat," gasped Latrille.

I managed to do it, looking over my shoulder to watch the boar. Luckily the dogs kept him busy.

Then, very quietly, Latrille died there in my arms—this smooth-faced, effeminate young man, shallow-minded, dissipated, treacherous maybe; yet he died without a complaint in the midst of terrible sufferings; and I threw his jacket over his face and took off my cap.

The boar had backed down a long narrow gorge, face to the hounds. I would have sounded the call "At bay!" but I felt more like sounding the "Death!" for poor Latrille.

And, as I stood there waiting for somebody to come up, Raoul Lartigues appeared, leading his horse, followed by the Countess Amyce, mounted.

I beckoned Lartigues and warned Amyce back.

"Dead?" whispered the Grand Veneur.

"It is a gray-boar," I said, quietly; "á moi, Monsieur le Grand Veneur."

He nodded and knelt by the motionless form under the tree. I put on my cap and walked down into the gully, boar-knife glittering in the faint forest light.

It was no triumph; the boar charged clumsily and the good hounds deserve the credit. But it was new to me, except in theory, and my hand trembled as I wiped the shining blade on the moss and set the horn to my parched lips and blew the "Death!" As I passed out of the gully, I mechanically stopped to pick up some folded papers, dropped from poor La-

trille's coat when the boar first struck him. Then I walked on to where Amyce sat silently on her horse, face averted from the tree under which Lartigues and two piqueurs stood around Latrille's body.

"It is frightful," she said, in a hushed voice—"I can't realise it! I—I danced with him last night."

"He was a brave man," I said.

More huntsmen arrived on jaded or limping horses, and the dusty stragglers of the pack followed to heel, jowls all dust and lather, tails adroop.

When his Highness and the Duchess appeared, and I had told what I knew, Amyce turned away to join them, leaving me with the silent huntsmen.

I sat down on a log, and, scarcely conscious of what I was doing, unfolded Latrille's papers—the papers that I had picked up in the path.

The next moment I was on my feet, terribly excited, but striving to maintain outward calm—the first instinct of the Anglo-Saxon.

"Where is Prince Edric?" I asked the Duke.

"He was not invited," said his Highness, dryly.

Amyce looked at me inquiringly. She saw the papers in my hand and motioned me to her side.

"It is nothing," I said; "but I must ride to Wiltz at once; I must see Edric. Will you believe it is necessity that drives me from you?"

She looked at me so strangely that I tried to smile, assuring her that there was nothing that need alarm anybody in my sudden flight.

But now other people came up and I could say nothing more, although I felt her eyes following my every movement as I flung myself on my horse and gathered bridle.

"Do not go," she said, in a voice that sounded harsh and strained. But I had only time for a word to her, an excuse to his Highness and the Duchess, then I galloped out into the wood-road and set spurs for a ride that might be a ride for life—the life of a man I held very dear.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SNARE

How the setting of one trap sprung another

In the golden light of the forest, under the clustering boughs where green leaves flickered and shadows moved, death seemed very far away.

As I rode the forest brook kept pace with me, babbling of deep meadows, and, from the arched oaks, high-spanned, leaf-laced against the blue, the little wood-birds sang and sang and scattered away into flight through sun-shot vistas before the tossing crest of my hard-spurred horse.

But Death was in the forest, and I was Death's messenger, sweeping on through the pleasant golden light, the perfume of fresh winds in my face, the happy song of living things in my ears.

As I rode I thought of the dead, back there somewhere among the bracken, white face skyward, dead eyes reflecting the passing clouds that they could not see. It was a brave, foolish death—a young man's death—a death among the sweet wild ferns under a summer sky.

Straight through the sun-rays, barring the path with floating gilded dust, I plunged, and entered the Wiltz road at a sharp gallop.

What should I say to Prince Edric? In my clenched hand I clutched papers that called on him to lead the

army and seize the power—the power of a government which had received him and sheltered him when his own country and his own Emperor denied him the freedom and liberty of its poorest peasant. These were the dead man's papers, this the bitter heritage of a reckless and gallant death—treason! But that no longer concerned the dead — already, perhaps, before the Great Court-martial—it concerned the living and all that was worth living for—honour.

Now, sweeping steadily onward, leaving a whirling pillar of red dust behind, I could distinguish the Wiltz Lodge through the thickets to the left. The place appeared to be deserted; the piazza was empty, the wooden window-shutters closed and barred outside.

Hoping against hope that Edric might not be away in the forest on some scientific excursion, I wheeled my tired horse heavily up to the gate and jumped to the gravel walk.

"Ohé! Nicola!" I shouted; but the blond servant did not respond; and I tied the reeking horse to the ring in the gate-post and walked swiftly to the piazza.

Twice I rang at the bronze bell; the second time, listening close to the door, I fancied I heard somebody move a chair in the breakfast-room.

"Nicola!" I called, pounding on the door; "wake up, idiot!" But to my surprise the door gave way under my push and swung noiselessly inward, and at the same moment I received a terrific blow between the eyes.

The next thing I knew I was stumbling, flung forward among a crowd of figures that pushed up close around me in the darkened hallway, then hurled me headlong through a doorway into a dark room. The

door behind me slammed; somebody locked it from the outside; then all grew still.

There was a man holding a candle in the darkened room with me, but I was too dizzy from the effects of the blow to see him clearly.

I recognised his voice first; then, when the mist cleared from my eyes, I saw the man was Prince Edric, standing there in his shirt-sleeves, the light of a candle playing over his face.

"What the devil's the matter?" he asked.

I stood up, shook myself, and stared blankly at the bolted door and locked shutters. As I turned around on him, mutely, he set the candle on a table with a gesture of caution, and pointed towards the door.

"At eight o'clock this morning your Duke's soldiers came here, arrested me while I was dressing, and locked me in here," he said, grimly. "Do you know why?"

"Arrested you!" I repeated, mechanically.

He shrugged his shoulders and sat down beside the table.

"I've been here all day and I'm getting tired. How did you come here?"

I tried to collect my thoughts, but what with the unexpectedness of the assault on me and the astounding news of Prince Edric's arrest, I found nothing coherent to tell him.

"You don't mean to tell me you are a prisoner, too?" he laughed, incredulously.

"Well, I didn't enter this room like a free agent, did I?" I asked, much annoyed.

"Hush!" he motioned; "there are two dozen soldiers in the house; they're probably listening at the door. They've been quiet as mice all day. I heard

your horse's hoofs outside; I heard you shout for Nicola, and I thought to myself, 'Here's Hardy. Now I'll know what all this row is about.'"

"Do you mean to say you were arrested by the Duke's orders?" I asked, in amazement.

"I saw no warrant; the soldiers said it was ordered; they were twenty or more to one. I went with them quietly, and here I've been all day!"

"Edric," I said, under my breath, "I don't believe the Duke had you arrested."

He raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

"Did you recognise any of the soldiers," I went on, anxiously, "or any officers?"

"No—that is, there was an officer with them—a pock-pitted colonel—what's his name?"

"Toxé?" I cried.

"Hush! Yes, but he was not in uniform; he was dressed for a boar-hunt. I heard the 'Tryst' sounded half an hour later, out there in the woods somewhere."

I looked desperately around; I went over and touched the locked door, the closed shutters of solid oak, bound with steel.

"No use," smiled Edric; "I've tried all that. Have you any theory about this affair, Hardy?"

"Oh yes, I have a theory," I replied, in despair, and I flung the papers, which I had found in the forest, on the table before him.

He looked up at me questioningly, then unfolded the traitorous memoranda, and read cooly to the end.

"Faugh!" he cried, with a scowl of disgust. "Is Athel of Luxembourg fool enough to believe such nonsense?" As he spoke he glanced up again, meeting my eyes disdainfully; then, starting to his feet he

stared at me, while an ugly, sullen flush mounted to his temples. And now his face grew fierce in its tense lines; his lips shrank back, his eyes glittered, and I caught a sparkle of white teeth under his short mustache.

"By God!" he said, in a voice scarcely human; "if you—or anybody believes this shameful lie—"

I could have laughed from sheer joy; for although I had never for a moment credited what seemed to be absolute proofs of Edric's treachery, I had felt the need of confronting him with them without a second's needless delay. That was why I had galloped, *ventre-à-terre*, to Wiltz Lodge—galloped into an ambuscade which I could never have foreseen had I ten times the diplomatic ability that I ought to possess. Edric had watched my face and read every thought; and now he sat down again at his little table, head bent, staring at the paper in his nervous hands.

The situation was certainly desperate enough. The Luxembourg army was apparently on the eve of revolt, determined to overthrow the Duke and acclaim Prince Edric, of Prussia, King of Luxembourg.

"Athel can't believe I knew of this," he said, piteously—"he can't believe it, can he, Hardy? If I were ignoble enough to accept the shelter of a country and then plot to steal it, I at least would have the courage to place myself at the head of the revolt! Any fool would know that, wouldn't he, Hardy?"

He started up and paced the floor. Grief, shame, horror, changed his face so that I should scarcely have known him. He appeared much older; those white haggard circles under each eye showed what the shock had been.

I started again on a quiet tour of the room, gently testing bolts and locks until I saw that the idea of escape or of getting any news to his Highness was, as far as we were concerned, probably out of the question.

"If we could persuade them to unbar that door for a second," whispered Edric.

I nodded and drew my long boar-knife; he wrenched a heavy chair to pieces and twisted off the rungs, making as little noise as possible. I fancy the soldiers must have heard the splintering, for they neither responded to our knocking nor did they even answer us, although I could hear them moving on the other side of the door.

I went to one of the locked shutters and worked at it with my boar-knife. It was slow progress, and, at that rate, I could not have pierced the smallest hole in the oak before night. I knew it, but worked feverishly.

"Where is the Duke?" asked Edric, behind me.

"Hunting; the others are with him too," I replied, slashing away at the shutter. While I worked with the long knife I told Edric all that had occurred since the horns sounded the "Tryst" under the green leaves in the carrefour on this fatal September morning.

At last, hopeless, I stepped back, opening and closing my cramped, blistered hands, convinced that it was time wasted to seek for escape in that direction.

"You are right," muttered Edric; "we must try something quicker."

"If we can't get to the Duke before he returns to Wilverwiltz the game is up," I said, bitterly. "What the devil are we to do?"

Had there been a heavy bit of furniture in the room we might have battered the shutters outward. There was nothing, save a flimsy table. Edric picked it up and drove it with all the strength of his arms and body against the shutters; they rang out soundly and solidly; the table crashed to kindling-wood and shattered every pane in the doorlike windows.

We were standing there, backs to the door, regarding our work with troubled hearts, when, behind us, the door opened, then slammed again with the click of keys turning. The wind from the opening and closing door extinguished the candle.

"There's somebody in the room," whispered Edric; "be ready; I have a match."

His match cracked and blazed. I saw two dark figures leaning back against the closed door as Edric, face and hands reflecting the red flame of the match, crossed the room and relighted the candle.

It was the Countess Amyce who stood before us. Toxé leaned against the bolted door.

Instantly the Countess turned on Edric, her dark eyes sparkling in the candle-glow, her scarlet hunting-habit looped to the girdle, from which hung a jewelled boar-knife.

"You traitor!" she gasped.

I stepped forward, aghast, but she faced me, motioning me back. The white scorn of her brow left me speechless.

"It was I who ordered your arrest!" she said, breathlessly, crossing the room to where Prince Edric stood with both hands on the back of his chair.

There was a moment of painful silence, broken by

a sharp echoing blow from her riding-crop on the desk where the traitorous memoranda lay. And :

"*That* is the reason !" she cried, striking the papers again and again with the horn-handled crop.

"You believe me guilty, madame ?" stammered the Prince, utterly taken aback.

"Guilty ! Your own spies have betrayed you. Shame ! I had those very papers from your creature, Vossburg ! God help you, Prince Edric !"

The Prince turned to me with a ghastly smile and would have spoken, but Amyce, her black eyes flashing, stepped between us and, with a swift movement, tore the little glove from where it hung between the buttons on my hunting-coat. I turned cold from head to foot.

"Are you mad ?" I said, hoarsely ; my lips scarcely formed the words.

"Oh," she cried, "this dishonor adds nothing to your degradation ! A man who betrays his sovereign can look unmoved on the woman who believed in him !"

I tried to speak ; I could not. Her words stabbed like a blade—to the heart.

"You left me to gallop to your fellow-conspirator, here, with news that Major Latrille had been killed, because you had found on that brave man's body the proofs that others knew of your treachery !"

"Latrille was a traitor !" I cried. "Good God ! can't you understand that you have been duped ?"

"Shame !" she said, steadily. "I myself gave him those papers after they had been sold to me by your vile spies. I myself ordered Prince Edric's arrest !"

She lifted the hem of her skirt and stepped back daintily, her scornful eyes on me :

"I saw you take the papers and ride away. I could not believe you would do it—I could not make myself believe you would come here to warn that—that traitor!"

Edric came silently to my side.

"Poor little fool!" he muttered. "She has done a sorry day's work, and the worst will come when she finds it out."

The worst was coming now. There sounded the rush of heavy feet along the road outside, the noise of many voices, the clank of bayonets, a savage cheer: "Death to the Duke!"

The Countess, incredulous, horrified, sprang from her chair and looked at Toxé. He returned her startled glance, unmoved.

"What—what does that mean?" she stammered.

"It means, madame, that you are my prisoner!" sneered Toxé, flinging open the door behind him. The hallway was choked with soldiers.

The little Countess of Wilverwiltz passed her gloved hand over her eyes, then turned white as death and swayed backward. There was a chair beside me. I placed it close to her, and she sank into it, covering her head with both arms.

"The revolt is accomplished, your Highness," said Toxé, bowing where he stood, cap in hand. "The Luxembourg regiment has gone to the château, where the Duke and Duchess will be held at your Highness's pleasure."

Dumb with astonishment, I saw Edric, serene, impassive, return Toxé's salute, and step forward.

"Your next step, Colonel Toxé, will be to send a

messenger to the German army across the frontier, will it not ?" he asked, smiling.

"Exactly, your Highness," said Toxé, with his evil leer; "anarchy in Luxembourg requires German intervention—perhaps German bayonets."

There was a sudden scuffle in the hallway among the soldiers. Toxé looked around, scowling.

"It's old De Ruyter," he sneered; "they want to shoot him in the garden."

"Shoot De Ruyter!" laughed Edric; "not a bit of it. Bring him here, Colonel Toxé, and let me try my persuasion."

The ignoble scene that followed left me without a shred of faith in any human being; for no sooner had De Ruyter been shoved into the room than Edric passed his arm through the arm of the old soldier, and led him away to the embrasure of a window. There they stayed so long that the mutinous soldiers began to grow impatient, and cries of "Down with De Ruyter! Death to him!" brought Edric back in a towering rage.

"Colonel Toxé," he said, icily, "your discipline is shameful! The next man who raises a seditious cry will be shot on the spot."

Toxé wheeled in his tracks and bellowed threats at the troops behind him, which certainly had the designed effect. They were painfully silent until Edric, leading De Ruyter back from the window, said in a perfectly distinct voice:

"Colonel de Ruyter is with me. I take him as my aide-de-camp!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the soldiers, surging forward and swinging their caps; but Toxé flung his huge

bulk against them, menacing them with his sabre until they fell back into the hallway again.

"Is there a horse ready?" asked Edric, in calm, even tones.

"Twenty," replied Toxé. "Is Colonel de Ruyter to ride to the German army?"

"Do you often ask questions of your superiors?" inquired Edric, coldly.

Toxé saluted, stammering excuses; then in a brutal voice he vented his wrath on his men, ordering them to clear the passage and bring a horse for Colonel de Ruyter. As that gray-haired old officer passed us with bent head and face averted I turned my back, unable to look upon such dishonour.

Never once did Edric glance at me during the whole miserable scene. The young Countess, head buried in her arms, sat by the desk where the candle-flame drifted and flared in every gust of wind. I pitied her.

"What is your Highness's pleasure concerning the prisoner, Hardy?" sneered Toxé.

At the word "prisoner," the Countess looked up just in time to see two soldiers place themselves on either side of me, bayonets fixed. In a moment she was at my side, her eyes bright with tears; and she took both my hands in hers, looking earnestly up into my face.

"No scenes—do you hear?" shouted Toxé.

"Silence!" cried Prince Edric, sternly.

"But those two prisoners," said Toxé, with a jerk of his thumb, "are dangerous to the welfare of Luxembourg, your Highness. I've arranged to send them to Belgium."

"I don't think they are dangerous," smiled Edric, looking at me; "set them at liberty."

Toxé hesitated, scowling; but the Prince said "Well?" so sharply that he touched his shako and motioned to his soldiers.

Leading Amyce, I moved slowly towards the door, then looked back at Edric. He stood, arms folded, head erect, and met my gaze with cold, inscrutable eyes.

If I had had my revolver I would have killed him where he stood.

The soldiers parted sullenly as we passed through the hallway into the free air outside, where a flaming sunset lay straight before us over the million leaves of the forest. Toxé followed, his evil eyes roaming restlessly about.

"Wait!" he cried, as I led Amyce through the gate. "I'll risk sending you across the frontier on my own responsibility. Come back, do you hear?"

Before I could protest he shouted an order, and, to my disgust, old Vossburg and Wiepert, armed with drawn revolvers, stepped from the bushes across the road and advanced, smirking and leering.

"March!" said Toxé, briefly.

"Do you intend to drive a woman across the frontier to-night?" I asked, steadying my voice with an effort.

"I do," grinned Toxé. "Come! pack!"

My hand flew to my boar-knife—and touched an empty leather scabbard. Vossburg had slipped the weapon from its sheath on my hip, and now he tossed it on the grass, leering and mouthing and laughing his crazy falsetto laugh.

Amyce laid her hand on my arm; she trembled a little, but said, quietly: "Come—it is best."

We walked for a long time in perfect silence save for the cracked treble laughter of old Vossburg and the wheezing of Wiepert. After a while, however, they began to taunt us, sneering at the deception they had practiced on the Countess; even, at times, menacing me with a short shrift.

"It's ten miles to the frontier," observed Wiepert. "I've a mind to settle your affair here, you pig of a Yankee!"

"Te-he! he!" yelped old Vossburg. "Nobody would know—nobody would know! We could put you in the swamp—deep! deep!—nobody would know!"

If they had not kept just out of reach I should have made an attempt, hopeless as it was; but they worked together like two ferrets, and their weapons were swinging in their hands as they walked.

Twice we left the forest path to take short cuts through the underbrush, and Amyce's gown was torn with briers and her little gloves ripped from brushing the bending thorn branches.

The dim light in the forest, now that the sun had nearly set, evidently bothered old Vossburg. He peered about with his weak, red-rimmed eyes, feeling his way, uncanny fingers spread like puffy claws. Finally Wiepert came around to whisper to him, and they both halted, looking at me. In a flash I understood that the same thought which was occupying me had also entered their heads—namely, that with the increasing twilight I would have a chance for resistance. From the villanous leer on Vossburg's countenance I also felt that they meant murder, and my

thoughts began to run very quickly—so quickly that before I realised what I was doing I had leaped on Wiepert and sent him crashing into the undergrowth. There came two sharp explosions, a cry, as I struck Wiepert over the temple; then we fell, writhing and twisting under the bushes, while old Vossburg, squealing with eagerness, ran around us, trying to shoot down into me. I held Wiepert as a shield, staggered to my knees, and, flinging him headlong from me, jumped behind a tree. Vossburg shot twice.

For a second I stood there breathless; then Amyce screamed, and I saw Vossburg on one side, Wiepert on the other, creep forward, circling around the tree so I should be caught between them.

There was only one thing to do; and as I sprang out into the twilight, Vossburg shot at me, then stepped back and shot again. I could have closed with him at the next step had not something else closed *on* him—for, with a whirr and a snap, a hideous hidden thing caught him in steel fangs and sent him head first into the undergrowth. He squeaked piteously and writhed. Had it not been for Amyce, Wiepert would have blown my brains out. But Amyce flung herself between us, though the brute fired at me nevertheless, until I got him and jerked his revolver out of his hand and shot him to death among the briers at my feet.

Amyce held her fingers out helplessly, looking at me with astonished eyes.

"It burns," she said, as I tore up her sleeve and stanched the flow where a single bullet, brushing the white skin, had left its stain just above the wrist. There was nothing of fright, nothing of dismay in her

wide dark eyes, only a childlike surprise as I whipped my handkerchief tightly around the wound, leaning closer to her in the gathering forest gloom.

As I stood there I heard a rustle, a twitching among the leaves, a faint squeal. It was Vossburg, dying. He had been seized by one wolf-trap and flung face downward into another. There was no way to unlock the trap. Even a wolf could not have lived longer than he did.

"Hark!" she whispered. "Do you hear?"

"It is a snake in the brush," I said, tying the knot.

I stepped over to the thicket and glanced down where, in the shadows, the steel fangs of the trap glimmered.

CHAPTER XXIII

MASKS OFF!

Accounting for various unaccountable things, with a hint of further and more important revelations

As we walked through the gathering dusk and came out among more open woods above the Wiltz road, I saw daylight closing above the red cinders of the western sun, and the night mists floating in the hollows. Rooks called from tree to tree; field-insects one by one awoke, their chirring gauzy wings beating the still sweet rhythm of the harmony that cradles a tired world under its sheeted stars.

But there was an hour of daylight yet ere the blue twilight fell and the rosy ashes sifted from the zenith—an hour that might save a ruler to his people and a husband to his wife.

"If I can get to the frontier," I said, speaking partly to the Countess, partly to myself—"if I can find a horse in this futile country, perhaps I might ride to the Dutch outposts before De Ruyter reaches the German lines."

The Countess began to cry, small head bent, wounded wrist resting helplessly in the loop I had fashioned for her out of my baldrick. She trudged along beside me, tears on her curved cheeks, silky hair blowing across her eyes—a most woful and desolate little figure.

Distressed and unhappy as I was over the astounding treason of Prince Edric, I pitied her more than I did myself. I had lost a friend; she was about to lose her country. The double treachery of the spies and of the wretched officer who had betrayed her, the knowledge that she had been duped and tricked into conniving at a shameful conspiracy—and that, too, in spite of my warnings—left her at first stunned. Now she tasted passionate grief, remorse, the knowledge that through her wilful distrust in everything and everybody except herself she, perhaps, had brought her country to ruin and shame forever.

As for me, I as yet scarcely felt the weight of my own responsibility—or guilt. No man living could have doubted Prince Edric's loyalty; the Duke had avoided him because the Duchess liked him, not because he for one moment imagined Edric was plotting. Yet it was true that the Countess suspected him, and it was also a fact that she had warned his Highness and me of her suspicions, and we had disregarded them. If I was guilty of carelessness, the Duke, who, even after the evidence of treason in the army haughtily closed his eyes to danger, was also guilty of graver neglect. I could not suspect a friend; he could not but suspect a regiment that he had found infected at the first probing.

"Does your arm hurt very much?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It isn't that," she said, pitifully; "I wish I had believed you."

"I wish I had believed you, too," I replied.

"Why," she said, innocently looking up at me, "I didn't believe it myself until I saw that paper. I only wanted Edric to go away because he made trouble for

the Duchess ; but when Vossburg brought me proofs of his treason—ah—then I should have taken the proofs to you ! It is too late—now."

She began to cry again, overcome by the misery that had fallen on all she loved best—fallen through her own wilfulness.

"I wish you had given me the proofs when you received them first," I said, simply, not meaning to hurt her. She leaned against a tree, face covered with both hands.

I could find nothing to say.

The rooks in the trees had ceased their calling ; a fire-fly, faintly phosphorescent, sailed upward through the still air.

"Come," I said, gently.

"Where ?" she asked, dropping her hands to her sides.

I turned and looked up the road. The château lay there, not far away, but the château was already in the hands of the rebellious troops. Had I been alone, my duty would have been with his Highness ; perhaps it was now. I could not leave the Countess; I dared not take her to the château, not knowing what danger there might be from the mob. It was many miles to the Countess's own home, the big house at Hèrault in the north. Even with horses it was a day's journey.

"Perhaps Edric's lodge is empty," I began, then stopped short, listening intently.

"Hark !" whispered the Countess, turning her head. "Oh, what is that dreadful sound ? Do you hear ?"

I heard well enough. Somebody up the road, not a dozen rods away, had begun to whistle an air that I

knew as well as I knew my prayers—my own regimental march.

"That's Osborne!" I said, excitedly. "He's whistling 'Garryowen!'"

What the pipes of Lucknow were to the woman on the wall, Osborne's careless whistle was to me. The next step brought him in sight, sauntering down the dusty road, hands in his pockets, head erect, whistling away to shame the royal blackbird of Armagh.

"Well, upon my soul!" he said, staring up at us as we emerged from the roadside thicket. "Have you just returned from the frontier?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Don't you know the army has revolted?"

"Oh yes, I know that," he said, coolly; "but I thought you and madame the Countess had been conducted to the frontier. Don't look like that, Gilbert."

"Look like what?" I cried, furious at his calm amusement. "Perhaps Prince Edric has won you over as he won De Ruyter and the Luxembourg army."

I spoke in a passion, and I repented even as I spoke, but, to my astonishment, Osborne burst into peals of laughter.

"The Luxembourg army!" he cried. "Why, Edric sent the entire Luxembourg army into the château cellar and turned the key on them!"

He laughed until his eyes grew dim, looking up at us from the road in the red light of the afterglow.

"Edric is a diplomat, which you are not, my son," he said, coming up the grassy slope, where we stood speechless. "He took De Ruyter as his aide-de-camp and sent him off, not to the Germans, but to the

Dutch army, if you please—under the very noses of the Luxembourg insurgents. Then he went back to the château where the Duke, his Excellency, Giroux, and myself had barricaded the terrace and collected the foresters and a few stray gendarmes. His Highness was furious at sight of Edric and opened fire on him from the terrace, but Edric quietly drew out his white handkerchief and walked straight out to the lawn. 'Have you a sensible man there?' he called out to me. His Excellency restrained the Duke from descending and challenging Edric to combat then and there, while I went down to parley—being a sensible man, you know. 'My army,' said Edric, with a funny expression in his eyes, 'has been shouting until it is thirsty, and I have pledged my word that it shall have the best wine in the Duke's cellar.' I tried not to laugh; I went back and spoke to his Excellency. In spite of the Duke's objections we raised the white flag on the terrace; then Edric ordered Toxé to let the army loose in the château cellar, and when Toxé began to shout 'Treason!' Edric took him by the collar and flung him out of the gate, advising him to go where he was more popular. And what do you think? The soldiers cheered! After that they went very willingly, by companies, to the cellar. They're all there now, locked in, hammering at the door or drowning their fright in the Duke's wine and singing the 'Lorelei.'"

The Countess began to laugh; an uncontrollable fit of laughter seized me, and we all sat down on the grass and laughed and laughed until the dark woods echoed again.

"And the best of it is," cried Osborne, "that Toxé

is at the Wiltz Railway Station, trying to telegraph to William the Sudden; but I tapped the wires two hours ago and the Duke is getting all his frantic messages!"

The Countess sprang up, breathless with excitement. She never thought of the wound, she had forgotten her sorrow, her remorse, the bitter chagrin. I could scarcely see her eyes in the dusk, yet I felt their sweetness and brightness.

Osborne rose; I jumped to my feet and aided the Countess to descend the bank. Both Amyce and I were full of the excitement of the situation, yet keenly alive to its humour. To think of the Luxembourg army in the cellar sent me into peals of laughter until Amyce began again and Osborne joined us from sympathy.

"I've been to Saint-Yssel on foot," he said. "I telegraphed the Dutch headquarters in case De Ruyter meets with delays. It's exciting, isn't it? Toxé will probably ride to the German frontier as soon as he's finished his telegraphing, and it would have been a race for Wilverwiltz between William the Sudden and the Dutch if I hadn't tapped the wires. His Excellency suggested it."

As we approached the château, where every window was lighted, I saw Giroux and his gendarmes patrolling the gateways, lanterns swinging, sabres drawn. From the château came smothered sounds—the voices of the army in the cellar, inebriated, chanting.

"They're singing the 'Lorelei,'" said Giroux, indignantly, "out of tune!"

I asked Amyce if she was tired, but she cried: "No, no! I shall not stir from the terrace until the Dutch cavalry comes!"

Bettina and his Excellency were on the terrace; Bettina and the Countess mourned over each other enthusiastically; his Excellency gave me a dry hand and a dryer smile.

"I guess," he said, "that they're going to abolish the army after this; so you won't be wanted any longer, Hardy." He glanced humorously at the Countess as he spoke. I think she heard him, for she turned her back and kissed Bettina again.

"My angel child," she said, "the horrors I have gone through—!"

"Have a pleasant trip to the frontier, Hardy?" suggested his Excellency.

"Where is the Duchess?" asked the Countess, looking anxiously around at his Excellency.

"I guess, madam, she's in that hammock out by the lake," replied his Excellency; "and my impression is that the Dook is with her."

There was a sudden silence.

"She had such a headache," said Bettina. "The army in the cellar made dreadful noises and frightened us all."

Nobody spoke.

"The Duke said he'd go down and thrash them, but the Duchess turned white and said he must not," continued Bettina, excitedly. "Then his Highness said, 'Bring me a riding-whip; I'll stop this outrage!' and her Highness said, 'Oh Athel!' and put both hands on his shoulders."

Bettina looked innocently at Osborne, then continued: "That is why they are out there by the lake in a hammock. I wish the army would not sing."

I heard Osborne say to Bettina: "If your head

aches—" and Bettina's reply, "Oh dear no—anyway, nobody would allow me to sit in a hammock."

His Excellency had moved out of earshot; Osborne and Bettina, perched on the parapet, looked up at the new moon and out at the calm dim lake, and then—I don't know where they looked, for I was looking at Amyce.

"I think I am tired," she said. "Will you tell Prince Edric that the Countess of Wilverwiltz thanks him for teaching her a lesson in common-sense?"

"Here he is, now," I said, gently.

As Edric stepped out on the terrace, she turned to him and held out both hands. There were tears in her eyes; she did not speak. He bent above her white hands, then straightened up, smiling and mischievous.

"Looked like a villain, didn't I?" he suggested, pleasantly.

I said, bitterly: "I ought to have known. I am not very intelligent you see."

Amyce glanced at me, then walked to the parapet, and I saw that her wistful eyes were fixed on the dim group of trees beside the lake where the Duke and Duchess moved slowly up and down, close together, under the new moon.

Edric and I watched them too, listening to the smothered howls from the imprisoned army, the fainter murmuring of Osborne and Bettina, the stir of breezes in the forest, the whisper of leaves on the terrace.

There came another sound, too, at first far off, but now nearer, ever nearer—a dull beating that grew into a throb, then a thudding tattoo, vibrating through the

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night. I knew what it was; so did Edric. The gendarmes at the lower gateways called the "Alert," then rode out to the great park gate where, from the shrouded woods, a stream of torches, one after another, flashed along in an irregular line. The torches were carried by horsemen, great burly fellows on tremendous horses, and after them thundered squadron after squadron of heavy cavalry, the rolling shocks of their drumming hoof-beats shaking the terrace.

"It's the Dutch cavalry!" shouted Giroux, galloping up and waving his arms as I hastened down the steps. I saw De Ruyter, gray with dust, draw bridle on the lawn and bow to his saddle-bow as, through the flare of the torches, between double ranks of cavalry, a carriage with outriders swept up the drive and stopped. Then I saw the Duke at the carriage door, bareheaded, and the Duchess, on her husband's arm, curtseying low, as cheer after cheer broke from the crowding cavalry, and a thousand sabres were unsheathed and lifted.

Somebody was stepping daintily from the gilded carriage—a young girl wrapped to the eyes in furs. She stood for a moment looking up at the château, smiling, pensive, silent.

But the cheers broke out anew and the sabre-blades turned and flashed blood-red in the torch-light, and the Duke raised his cap and cried:

"Long live her gracious Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina, of Holland!"

The cheers swept the ranks like volleys along the battle-line. The white marble steps, glimmering red under the reflected torch-glow, were crowded with brilliant throngs now, for the Queen was mounting

the escalier, slowly, serene, a faint smile curving her lips, her eyes and hair brilliant in the shifting light.

Bareheaded I backed against the balustrade and bowed; his Excellency bowed beside me, and took his place next to a fat Dutch general, with mottled cheeks and a needle-like mustache. Suddenly there came a halt in the long line; the Queen had stopped full in the radiance of the terrace lamps, her eyes fixed on a figure that stood motionless on the terrace—so close that her furs almost brushed his breast. The figure was Prince Edric; and if his face was pale, hers was whiter still.

The next instant the Queen had passed.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BUTTERFLY

Being an account of further revelations, and leaving a promise that binds nobody yet leaves the future to fulfil

THERE had been a great deal to do during the week that followed her Majesty's arrival at Wilverwiltz —boar-hunts to attend, wolf-drives in the free Ardennes, golf-matches, horseback excursions, and every evening a particularly brilliant ball and Venetian illumination, so extravagant that the Duke's treasurer, the Semitic Baron d'Arlon, spent hours of anxious inspection over columns of figures that stirred the few remaining kinks on his bald head.

One painful incident marred the universal gaiety—the disciplining of the army. It was not disbanded ; it was not even imprisoned except during the night in the cellar. But next day the Duke sent for the parents of every soldier there, and they arrived *en masse,* marshalled by Giroux. Then the Duke gave to every pair of parents a rattan cane, and showed them the way to the cellar; and the sounds that issued from that subterranean vault were bitter and instructive.

Presently a column of mothers emerged from the cellar, breathless, triumphant, escorting a file of soldier sons, hustled and slapped at intervals by another column of fathers. It was soon over ; Giroux and his

gendarmes escorted them back to their barracks in Luxembourg, a spectacle viewed with undisguised horror by the stolid Dutch cavalry. I said to his Excellency: "I refuse to be identified with such an army. For Heaven's sake, take me back on your staff, or let me go home—I don't care which!"

"Eh?" said his Excellency, looking at me over his glasses.

"I don't care which," I repeated, sullenly.

We were standing on the lawn, watching her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina driving off the tee. She drove beautifully. The Duchess clapped her white-gloved hands and cried, "Splendid, your Highness!" The Duchess was dazzling in her beauty; the sun glittered in her burnished hair till it glowed like molten copper. "Where is my driver?" she asked, with a new confidence in her dainty smile, knowing that her husband was close beside her.

She drove; her husband answered her inquiring glance with another that said, "There is nobody like you—in golf or in love." So she went on, her happy eyes resting on her husband's face, he beside her, selecting her brassy as he walked. Yet she had driven very badly, God knows.

"Eh?" repeated his Excellency, peering at me over his glasses.

"It doesn't matter to me whether I stay here or go back to Fort Apache and die of dry rot," I said, sulkily.

"The Countess is driving off the tee," observed his Excellency.

Amyce swung over, bit her lip, caught my eye, frowned, then swung over again.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bettina; for the Countess was easily the best on the links.

"You may take my place," said Amyce, suddenly, and placed her driver in Bettina's hands.

"But—" began Bettina.

"I do not care for golf this morning," said the Countess, serenely, and crossed the lawn to the terrace where dozens of pink and white baronesses chattered, under pearl-coloured sunshades, with dozens of heavy Dutch cavalry officers, glittering and empressé.

"Well," said his Excellency, examining the bunch of corn-flowers in his button-hole, "I guess you'd better go back then, Hardy."

I swallowed in silence.

"You don't want to waste your time here," he went on, "and I have no use for a military attaché. I guess you had better go back to America." He spoke very distinctly—not loudly, however, but he turned his head towards the terrace as he spoke, and the Countess must have heard every word.

"Yes," continued his Excellency, raising his voice the least bit and staring dreamily at a yellow sunshade —"yes, Hardy, there's nothing to keep you in Luxembourg any longer. Can you catch to-night's train?"

"Yes," I muttered, looking at Amyce. Her back was towards me; it remained so.

Bettina drove off the tee; Osborne followed, and away they went over the lawn, a dimpled caddy following like a wingless Cupid with his quiver full of golf-sticks.

"By Heaven," I blurted out, "I believe Osborne is going to win that girl!"

"I'm damned sure of it," observed his Excellency. He glanced reflectively at his broad boots, placed both hands behind his back, and began an irritating, balancing motion, still staring at his boots.

I don't know why the happiness of another should have depressed me. I looked at the blue sky with a heavy heart. His Excellency surveyed the firmament with condescension, turned on his heel and walked across the grass in the wake of the golfers. I followed.

Her Majesty of Holland was lofting; she lofted perfectly and holed. There came a ripple of applause and laughter.

"Where's Prince Edric?" demanded his Excellency, twisting around to look at me.

"In his lodge," I replied.

"He hasn't been here since the Queen came, has he?" asked his Excellency, abstractedly.

"No—you know why."

"I guess I do," said the old man, chuckling.

Everybody knew it now; the romance of Prince Edric was everybody's property at Wilverwiltz. For his pretty peasant girl at the forester's lodge a year ago had been the capricious little queen herself; and the very day of her arrival a year ago—the day he left to avoid her—she had donned the costume of the country, as she often did, and had visited old Van Tassel, the head forester. There she and Edric had met. Neither knew the other, and Van Tassel did not know the Queen. There she and Edric parted, and there she lost the ring.

"Like a story book, ain't it?" observed his Excellency.

"Is Edric going away ?"

"I guess so. I guess he's going to be reconciled to his dear Kaiser," said his Excellency, pleasantly.

"Do you think—"

"Pooh!" said his Excellency, sharply, "don't bellow things like that at the top of your lungs !"

We walked on in silence. The Duchess was putting. She didn't hole, but the Duke said, "Splendid !" and nobody smiled.

Presently his Excellency said, "Hardy, you haven't much horse-sense, have you ?"

I grew scarlet, but the old man touched my arm kindly, and we walked towards a marble seat under the trees. There his Excellency seated himself and plucked several grass-blades, selecting the most appetising to chew.

"Why don't you marry the little Countess ?" he asked, taking off his hat and fanning his benevolent face.

I could not take offence where only kindliness was meant. I said, quietly, "She does not care for me—that is why."

"And you asked her ?"

"Yes," I said, simply.

"When ?"

"Yesterday."

"She refused ?"

"Yes."

"I guess," said his Excellency, "that she was afraid you demanded it as a kind of payment in gratitude for saving her from old Vossburg. Women are that way."

"No sensible woman could think me such a fool !" I retorted, hotly.

"Women are that way," repeated his Excellency.

"Oh," I said, wearily, "I'm tired of them. Send me back to Fort Apache. All I ask is to get to sea."

"Very well," he said, gravely; "'a man's a ass as goes to sea'—and you fill the bill, my son."

He rose and started again in the wake of the golfers, saying over his shoulder, "Better go and have your orderly pack up."

I stood for a moment watching him. Presently old De Ruyter joined him, and they trotted off to the green where the Queen of Holland was lowering the record for the fifth hole.

I looked at the sunshine, the white clouds sailing; I heard the river ripple and the wood-bird's cheery piping. I was a miserable man. A butterfly came fluttering around me, it followed me persistently back to the château. There I understood that it wanted my button-hole bunch of sweet-peas, so I laid the flowers on the terrace wall, and the delicate-winged creature settled on them and uncoiled a threadlike proboscis.

I had been standing watching the butterfly for some time. The house was very still, the baronesses and the officers were strolling two by two into the forest beyond the third gate. Presently they disappeared; a cloud dimmed the sun, and the cool shadow fell across the house.

"Are you going away?" said a voice very near me. Amyce leaned from the conservatory door, her lips touched with a mocking smile, her sunshade swinging in her left hand. She offered me the right; I took it and said, "Good-bye—yes, I am going."

"To-night?"

So she *had* heard his Excellency.

"Yes."

"Then—if you are going—my ring."

I lifted the chain from my pocket, detached the ring, and gave it to her without hesitation.

"Thank you," she said, faintly.

I thought she was going to pass me, so I stepped back a pace. She walked to the terrace parapet, where the butterfly was probing the sweet-peas. It did not fly up when she bent close to it; even when she lifted the blossoms close to her face it still clung to them, opening and shutting its painted wings.

After a while she turned and went back into the conservatory. I did not intend to follow, but I did. We sat on a window-seat and watched the butterfly, now quite at home on the flowers she held close to her face.

"I think," she said, "that Prince Edric will be happy at last. He, too, is going away."

"He is going away to win the woman he loves," I said, pleasantly.

She looked at the ring on her finger, then at the butterfly.

"You must be very happy to know that the Duchess—" I began, but she cried: "Ah, yes, I am happy now—perfectly happy. Their troubles are ended at last. Why should I not be happy? It is all I wished for—that her husband should understand her."

"So you are happy?" I said.

"Perfectly."

After a long silence I rose and walked to the door. Her face was closer to the flowers now.

"So you are happy?" I repeated.

"Perfectly."

Something bright, like a diamond from her ring, fell on the sweet-peas. The butterfly, alarmed, flew up and hovered around her head. A single drop—dew, perhaps—clung to a petal, then fell. And she raised the flowers to her lips and kissed them, eyes closed, wet lashes trembling on her cheeks.

After a while the butterfly came back, but the crushed blossoms lay on the floor now, fragrant as the sweet face that rested close to mine—frail as the white hands that clasped my neck.

I stooped and kissed her parted lips. The sunshine dazzled her eyes; she closed them.

On the blossoms at her feet the butterfly slowly waved its crimson-banded wings.

ENVOI

THAT evening Prince Edric rode away to the frontier, where his consecrated Sovereign and eighty thousand disciples squatted in rows on the landesgrenze, peering across the boundary at the blue woods of Luxembourg.

The sudden arrival of the Dutch cavalry at Wilverwiltz astonished the Kaiser; the appearance of the Queen of Holland horrified him; but the courteous diplomatic note from the Duke, notifying William the Sudden that the insurrection had been happily quelled without the necessity of invoking the good offices of Germany, drove the Sudden Potentate to the verge of distraction.

Where now was his chance for meddling? Toxé, bouncing up and down on a fat plough-horse, arrived too late to do anything except arouse the Sudden One to a fury, cataclysmic in its sublimity. But if he was sublime in his anger, he was majestic in his sulks. Rage deprived him even of his accustomed consolation—a speech to his guards regiments. He slammed the hilt of his sabre on the mess-table, glared at his staff, then rose, mounted, and walked his horse to the very edge of the frontier, followed timidly by his staff in blocks of five.

It was a death-blow to his philanthropic schedule, this imbecile submission of the Luxembourg army;

and, as he fidgeted in his saddle, staring out across the sunset and the kindling meadows, he uttered an immortal epigram, paraphrasing the last words of the Great Napoleon—"Bête d'armée!"

Yet, in the very instant of defeat, victory was to be thrust upon him; Prince Edric, even at that moment, was riding through the pleasant Hèrault meadows on his way to submit to his gracious Kaiser—humbly submit to a happy destiny that might open a vista of unlimited meddling to the Sacred and Sudden One—the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

So he rode out of the château gates, cap in hand.

I rode with him, a bunch of faded sweet-peas in my coat. On the terrace above us, as we passed, the Duchess leaned down beside her husband to bid us good-speed; Bettina and Osborne nodded condescendingly; his Excellency and De Ruyter, like a pair of gentlemen owls, regarded our going as the great desert Sphinx watches the wind-blown sands. The Queen of Holland was walking by the lake with Amyce, sweet, serious, head bent, white hands clasped. They turned as we galloped through the gate; I saw them standing still in the blaze of the red, level sun.

We were half-way to the frontier before we spoke; then Edric said:

"There is little hope for a man who changes his mind; there is no hope for a man who doesn't."

"I'm always in favour of a new shuffle when the pack goes stale," I observed. "Let the Emperor deal."

"Yes, 'a new deck and a new deal,' as the devil said when he dealt damnation all around."

"The shortest road to heaven is through hell," I said, cheerfully.

"If it lay through paradise we wouldn't know it when we got there," suggested Edric.

"Perhaps," I assented, vaguely.

After a while I fished a horse-shoe out of my pocket and regarded it sentimentally. The shoe had five nails in it.

"You will be happy for five years," observed Edric.

"For more than that," said I. "The Countess's horse has three other shoes."

Presently he said, "And you are going to Fort Apache?"

"That's where my regiment is going," I answered.

"A sort of desert—eh?"

"Not at all—the Countess of Wilverwiltz will be there."

Dusk hovered in the valleys as we cantered out into the Hèrault meadows, where the white granite posts of the frontier stretched from horizon to horizon.

And there, on the edge of the boundary, we gave each other our hands and said a quiet farewell—perhaps for all time.

I watched him walk his bay mare across the border towards a group of horsemen—a mediæval group—giants on gigantic chargers, helmeted, armed, and clad in steel—splendid mailed riders of the Cuirassier Guards of his Imperial Highness, William the Sudden. The War Lord was there too, towering up in his saddle, scaled cheek-guard clasped, eagle-crested helmet shadowing the high cheek-bones of a sombre, relentless visage.

In the rising night-mist the group wavered before me like figures on a wind-stirred tapestry; then I wheeled my horse back into the ashes of the sunset.

A star broke out overhead, a planet, sparkling like an amethyst—the blue Love-Planet, veiled in violet. Behind me the silver trumpets blew long — faintly, more faintly — the banners of the night-mist waved through the forest, pale shadows stirred through a white dusk shrouded in fog.

Yet, as I rode, head lifted, eyes dreaming, the purple planet's slender rays, splintering the mist, led me back through strange ways, through fear and distrust and the mazes of false doubts, to all that I loved best.

The scented night was silent where the white peacock brooded, ghostlike, above the marble parapet; the dim soft star-torch flickered in the zenith. Amyce, standing on the terrace, all alone, stretched out both small hands to me.

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